

Common questions in suffering:

We're going to identify a couple key ones here (there could be more we're not addressing). **But here's why we're calling out these questions:**

1. **Sometimes we don't realize we're asking these questions**—it is more of a mindset, or a lens through which we view our suffering.
2. **There are particular feelings and questions that attend suffering that turn us inward**: it can feel like our situation is unique—and the enemy wants us to think we're alone in it, that no one else has experienced it. Because then no one, not even God, can speak into it, OR we are too ashamed to ask for help. And we stay where we are.
 - a. We're not alone. Be encouraged that 1. suffering is a human experience—and often the questions we face in our particular suffering are similar to those that others face in their suffering, despite the difference in circumstance. And 2. God is on your side. He has given you what you need to be joyful and hopeful in suffering, WHILE still lamenting and being honest about your feelings.

Here's some of the common questions and a few notes about them—to help us identify if we're viewing suffering through a particular lens:

1. **How could God do this/why would God do this?**
 - a. **On trial: God's goodness.**
 - b. The solution people are looking for in the question "How could God do this?" is that people want God to take away the suffering, or take them out of the suffering. They want the suffering to stop. The hope is in the non-existence of suffering.
 - c. Some people doubt God's existence, because he hasn't made the suffering stop. However, in this world, we all suffer in some capacity, whether or not we believe God is real. So, clearly the suffering won't stop, and God doesn't stop the suffering. But the suffering would still be present, even if you take God out of it.
 - d. So, this question, "How could God do this?" is misplaced. God is not the source of suffering—the enemy, the curse, and sin is. The hope is not in God stopping suffering. The hope is not in us not being exempt from suffering. We need to correctly place the suffering for what it is so that we can see that God is on our side. And then we need to see that the hope is that we can go through suffering unto death and walk out alive at the end, like Jesus did. Not getting rid of death, or the suffering that goes along with it, but over-conquering death.
 - e. UNHELPFUL answer: A "God is sovereign. Suck it up." type answer.
 - f. HELPFUL: God is WITH you. He's not causing this. He's with you in it and has overcome its end (death), and you'll over-conquer it in the end. He understands your suffering, because he suffered on your behalf (Hebrews 12:1 – 6).

2. Why is this happening to me?

- a. Could be implied: I don't deserve this. And/or, why is this happening to me, and not THEM? Comparison.
 - i. **On trial: God's justice.**
 - ii. Comparison and self-righteousness in the midst of suffering can be all-consuming. They are also isolating. It feels like no one is able to understand—because in this mindset, it feels like your suffering is worse than other people's, or more undeserved.
 - iii. This mindset can also come from seeing a perpetrator continue to “prosper”—usually in worldly ways, but in ways that still *seem* like a blessing.
 - iv. In this state, the understanding of both common grace and also God's justice/vindication are really important.
- b. Could be implied: There must be something wrong with me.
 - i. **On trial: God's love.**
 - ii. This assumption could be repressed (we might not be aware of it).
 - iii. This perspective assumes something is wrong with us, or that God will not bear with us in order to love us.
 - iv. I'm not sure if this question is only specific to trauma or abuse, but in my experience and in the experience of those I've talked to with insecurity like this, it seems to start with a specific wound that is then confirmed over and over.
 - v. In this instance, the anger for justice and vindication is not taken out on others, but rather on oneself through self-hatred or striving to make oneself better and therefore more secure by earning love in some way.

Suffering well—in joy and hope:

If YOU are suffering:

1. **Attitude: We shouldn't be surprised by suffering.** No one is entitled to not suffer. Hope is not found in the absence of suffering, but in the trust in God in the middle of it.
 - a. 1 Peter 4:12 “Dear friends, **do not be surprised** at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed.”
2. **Don't repress your feelings.**
 - a. If you already have—you will either proportionally feel less feelings (or none) than a situation warrants, or more. See “Becoming Unrepressed” episode #166.
3. **Lament with God**—reference **Laurie Krieg's Journey Well** book process. (Or *Becoming Unpressed* episode has some similarities). Journey Well:
 - a. **Get quiet:** Bible, journal pen, read a favorite Bible passage

- b. **Ask:** “God, What would you like me to lament? What in my life has not been grieved?”
 - c. **Wait for a trigger:** If nothing comes to mind in 10 – 20 mins, wait for when you DO feel triggered (a response out of proportion to the situation- greater or lesser).
 - d. **While writing, “puke it out”:** “The Psalms are beautiful, but yours doesn’t have to be.”
 - e. **To whom? Write it to God.** He can handle whatever you throw at him.
 - f. **What do you write?** Tell the story, then move to how it made you FEEL. What it made you believe. What you lost.
 - g. **If you don’t feel anything yet, don’t worry.**
 - h. **Take it to a trustworthy person.** Might help you feel the feelings.
- 4. **Forgive**—reference Laurie Krieg’s Journey Well book process.
- 5. **Process your feelings in the right way with the right people.**
 - a. Not authentic for authenticity sake—**cathartic versus healing** and growing in the right direction
 - b. Not passively—if you repress emotions and don’t deal with them, they will come out in harmful ways to yourself or others.
 - c. Don’t gossip, if your suffering involves others that have harmed you. Confront them biblically if needed.
 - d. Pick people to talk to who will tell you the truth vs try to fix it (not the same thing), AND who will listen to you—not just tell you what you want to hear.
 - e. It might take awhile. You might say the same things over and over. For a long time. You can do this out of bitterness—letting it fester, or out of needing to get more out of the wound for deeper healing.
 - f. Let people know how to help you. Even if it is—“I need to be alone for a while and I don’t need to talk—but pray for me in these ways... I love you and I’ll be back.”
- 6. **Feast on God’s word**—remember, God is on your side. He is WITH you not against you in suffering. Turns out, the Bible has a lot to say about lamentable suffering—and suffering that is not a punishment/consequence of sin. Here’s some passages to look at (outside of sermon passages Romans 8 + 1 Thessalonians):
 - a. Narratives like Ruth, Daniel, Job, the Gospels, Acts. Imitate their faith.
 - b. Lament + hope:
 - Lamentations
 - Psalms, esp:
 - Ps. 16
 - Ps. 27
 - Ps. 34
 - Ps. 42 – 44
 - Ps. 69
 - Ps. 73
 - Ps. 77

- Ps. 88
- Ps. 102
- c. Exhortations for suffering:
 - James 1
 - 2 Corinthians 4
 - 1 Peter 4 – 5
- d. God's justice/Vengeance—if you see the wicked seemingly prosper over you:
 - Ps. 37
 - Isaiah 61
- e. Proverbs: one of the themes is the difference between wisdom, wickedness, and foolishness—and the fruit that each of these brings.
 - Not a promise, but a pattern and the intent of the Lord. This is how he has set up the world to work—sowing and reaping. We do have some control and influence over our situation. This is empowering.

Walking faithfully with someone else in suffering:

1. Negative example—Job's friends (Job 42:7 – 9)
 - a. Falsehoods against God
 - b. Flattery
 - c. Human comfort over trust in God and godliness
2. Positive example—Jesus weeping with Mary and Martha (John 11)
3. Profession versus lament (recap from AMA):
 - a. Response to "I can't do it" as a *theological* statement: "Don't tell me you can't do it."
 - b. Response to "I can't do it" as a *lament*: "I know" and comfort. Listening and presence.