

Holiness and Suffering
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A. Walking in Holiness

1. God's Word gives us parameters for the proper expression of our relationships and sexuality
 - a. Joshua 24:15, "choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve."
2. "You shall be holy to me; for I the Lord am holy, and I have separated you from the other peoples to be mine." Leviticus 20:26
3. The biblical words commonly used for holy or holiness in the scriptures imply a separation, being consecrated unto God.
4. Holiness is more than living a sacred life
5. Three key questions
6. To embrace holiness, we must embrace the fullness of God

B. Purity of Heart

"Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me." Psalm 51:10

1. To embrace holiness and purity is to live a life free from immorality
 - a. it is not living with the absence of something but with the presence of *Someone*
2. "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God." Matthew 5:8
3. Purity first focuses us on our inner being
 - a. "Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me." Psalm 51:10
4. Pursuit of moral living based on performance will ultimately fail
 - a. "Flee the evil desires of youth and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, along with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart." (2 Timothy 2:22).
5. Purity of heart affects our thinking, relationships, attractions, desire, and behavioral choices

C. Drawing a line in the sand

"But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people." (NIV); "let it not be named once among you" (KJV); "must not even be mentioned among you" (NRSV) Ephesians 5:3

1. Paul emphasizes that not even a hint of it should be spoken or among us
2. *Porneia*, Greek word in Ephesians 5:3, translates as "sexual immorality"
3. Sexual behavior outside of heterosexual marriage is considered fornication and unacceptable
4. We must, with singleness of heart, address the misbeliefs we have about sex and sexuality
 - a. "He must become greater; I must become less." (John 3:30)

TABLE TALK QUESTIONS

- 1. How have you tried to make yourself more righteous, holy, or pure in your own strength?**
- 2. How can I make purity more of a focus on my inner being rather than in behavior modification?**

D. Suffering

“Son though he was, he learned obedience from what he suffered.” Hebrews 5:8

1. Living a holy and pure life requires our obedience
2. Jesus learned obedience through suffering

E. Suffering as part of the Christian walk

“Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.” (Matthew 7:13-14).

1. To enter the small gate, requires choices, which call us to die to ourselves
2. Not only is the gate small, but the road is narrow as well
3. Suffering arises from different sources and for different reasons

F. Suffering due to past wounds

1. The quality of past relationships affects our identity, emotional well-being, and choices we make
2. We often do not want to suffer through facing our past pain
3. I may have fear associated with embracing pain and suffering

G. Suffering due to self-denial

1. Our society is one of extreme individualism
2. Areas where we may have to experience self-denial
3. Denial of self is the denial of ego
 - a. requires placing God first as a priority in our everyday living
 - b. requires the relinquishing of my control
 - c. I submit myself to a higher authority relinquishing my rights at the foot of the cross

“He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth. (Isaiah 53:7). “For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame...” (Hebrews 12:2)

H. Processing our suffering with Jesus

“...weeping may stay for the night, but rejoicing comes in the morning.” Psalm 30:5

“Some suffering is given in order to chastise and correct a person for wrongful patterns of life (as in the case of Jonah imperiled by the storm), some suffering is given not to correct past wrongs but to prevent future ones (as in the case of Joseph sold into slavery), and some suffering has no purpose other than to lead a person to love God more ardently for himself alone and so discover the ultimate peace and freedom.” Tim Keller, *Walking with God through Pain and Suffering*, p. 47

1. Jesus was abandoned, rejected, abused, shamed, and cursed
2. Suffering is a deeply personal experience, often feeling like we are alone.

3. We must process our suffering with Jesus
 - a. seek the Holy Spirit to identify and surface our emotions and wounds
 - b. choose to remain present inviting Jesus into the wound and suffering
 - c. let the pain, suffering, and emotions be absorbed by His broken body on the cross
 - d. allow Jesus to help us process, reclaim, and restore that which was lost by my wounds
 - e. ask Him to strengthen us to extend forgiveness where it is needed
 - f. establish the cross of Jesus in the memory of this wound
4. Allowing Jesus to inhabit our suffering is a redemptive act.
5. Jesus redeems our suffering, causing it to become something of benefit to us
 - a. We benefit from His comfort: For just as we share abundantly in the sufferings of Christ, so also our comfort abounds through Christ. (2 Corinthians 1:5).
 - b. We benefit in His glory: “Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.” (Romans 8:17).
 - c. We benefit in knowing the power of His resurrection: “I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death,” (Philippians 3:10).
 - d. We benefit by becoming overjoyed: “But rejoice inasmuch as you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed.” (1 Peter 4:13).
6. We need God’s divine objectivity to see suffering as a necessary and worthwhile experience

Questions which may be helpful to consider:

- Has suffering blocked my capacity to engage with others and God?
- Have I embraced self-hatred, self-pity, or become cynical?
- Have I become demanding of God?
- Am I unwilling to follow God further unless He heals me?