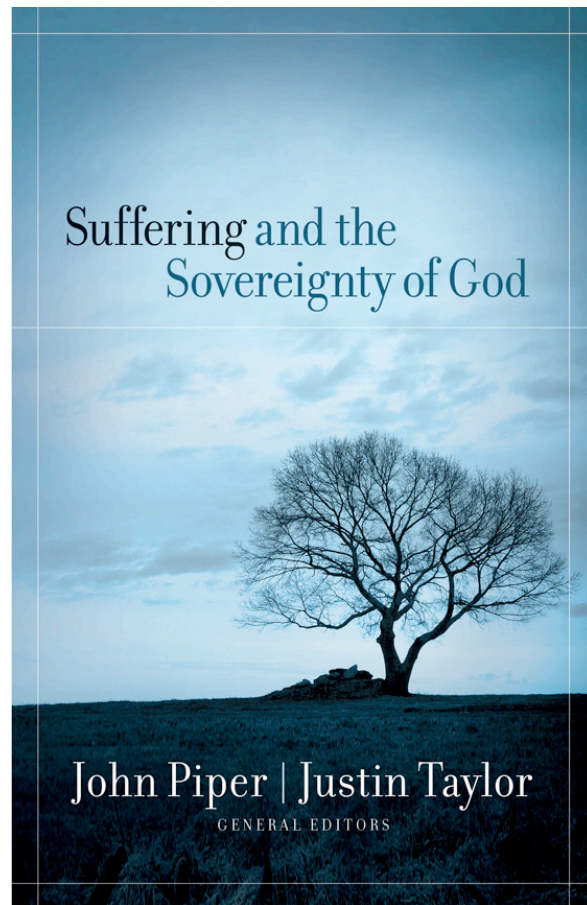


Suffering and the Sovereignty of God Study Guide



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Explanation of Study Resources

In an effort to encourage discussion and deeper engagement with *Suffering and the Sovereignty of God*, we have developed a ten-week study of the book. The following sections explain the Reading and Viewing Plan, the Study Guide itself, and recommendations on structuring this group study.

We feel that these study resources would work best in a group setting. Not only do we believe in the biblical principle that iron sharpens iron, we also long to see church communities strengthened together in the foundations of the gospel. Nevertheless, we hope that these study resources can also be of benefit for individual study and reflection. If an individual were to utilize these resources, that person should feel free to use whatever portions of these resources would most effectively help them learn more of Scripture and treasure more of God in Christ.

Reading and Viewing Plan

Where possible (see Group Time below), each week consists of reading a portion of the book, viewing (when applicable) a corresponding message on DVD, and answering/discussing study questions relating to the material. We have broken down the readings and viewings into ten separate weeks. Generally, one chapter from the book and one corresponding session on the DVD will be covered each week. You will notice, however, that certain weeks cover two chapters/sections in the book, other weeks have no corresponding DVD session to view, and two weeks will only cover half a chapter. You will also notice that the study progresses in the *order of DVD sessions*, rather than the order of chapters in the book. Making sure your group is aware of the schedule shifts and turns will aid in the study's smooth progression.

****Note:** If you decide to use only the book and not the DVD set (see Group Meeting below), you may choose to read the chapters from week to week in the order they appear in *Suffering and the Sovereignty of God*. Progressing this way seems clearest and most straightforward, and would be the easiest for a group to follow. In such cases, however, we would still suggest breaking the reading of chapter 2 into two weeks (see weeks 4 and 5 in the Reading and Viewing Plan), reading chapters 4 and 5 in one week (see week 7) and Appendices 1 and 2 in one week (see week 2).

Study Guide

The study guide contains questions for the individual to think and ponder as they read during the week. These questions are aimed at deepening one's understanding of the reading, provoking one to further study and thought, and stirring personal reflection and application of the themes and biblical truths covered.

The questions appear in the order they are discussed in the book, and most questions will have key page numbers for quick reference. The individual may choose to answer these questions during their reading, or after their reading as a means of review and reflection.

Each individual should decide for themselves what pace to work through the weekly reading and study material. We have provided a suggested pace of five daily readings with two corresponding study questions per day. These daily allotments appear in the study guide.

You will also notice that five questions per week appear in the study guide in bold letters. For more on these questions see Group Meeting below.

Group Meeting

We believe that the group meeting is an extremely valuable time for discussion, reflection, internalization of the material covered, and prayer. We have selected questions from the Study Guide which we feel would be helpful and fruitful questions for group discussion. These questions appear in bold lettering within the study guide. There are five such questions that appear for each week's reading. If you feel that other questions in addition to or instead of the questions we have selected would be of more benefit to your group, please do not hesitate to lead your group in those directions. Or if you are able to develop questions of your own that would better fit your group or touch on other areas that need discussion and reflection, again do not hesitate to do so. Our hope is that the Study Guide will be a resource that gets you started and that launches other creative and worthwhile efforts to deepen knowledge, faith, and love.

We also want to encourage extended times of group prayer during your group meetings. Every one of us undergoes pain and suffering to some extent, and it is likely that some in the group will be in particularly dark times during your study. Help carry one another's burdens and learn to weep with those who weep by lifting up one another's sorrows to our

sympathetic high priest, Jesus Christ. You may choose to pray as a large group, or to break into smaller groups. You could break into small groups that change from week to week, or maintain the same smaller prayer groups throughout the study. Whatever you may choose, we hope that prayer for one another will be an integral part of your time together, both during the group meetings and throughout the week as you progress through this study.

Not every group will be able to cover both DVD and discussion/prayer in a single session due to the length of the DVD sessions. DVD sessions range from 60 to 70 minutes in length. For those groups who have 1½–2 hour meeting times, this may provide ample time to view the DVD and discuss what was viewed and read over the past week. For those groups who meet for only an hour (or less), one of the following options may be appropriate:

- Lengthen the study to go beyond 10 weeks by viewing the DVD one week and discussing the DVD and reading the following week.
- Make each individual responsible for viewing the DVD session at some point during the week. This could be done by rotating a copy (or copies) of the DVD to the various individuals in the group.
- Choose to only read and discuss the book, and not view the DVD sessions during the group study.

We strongly believe that the group meeting is an invaluable, God-given means to mutual growth in faith, encouragement in the Word, and comfort in suffering. For these reasons, we would discourage a group meeting that consists only of viewing the DVD, cutting out discussion and extended times for group prayer. You may want to develop other and better ways to incorporate times of group discussion and prayer with DVD viewing. If God leads you to do so, would love to hear your idea and how it has worked in your group.

We pray deep blessings for you and your group during this study. May the God and Father of Jesus Christ be greatly magnified as the sovereign Lord over suffering, the solid rock under our feet during suffering, the sympathetic comforter in the midst of suffering, and the superior treasure to anything that this life's sufferings may take away from us. Amen.

Week	Chapter to Read	Session to View
1	Chapter 1—Suffering and the Sovereignty of God John Piper	<i>Session 1</i>
2	Appendix 1—Don't Waste Your Cancer John Piper and David Powlison Appendix 2—Interview with John Piper John Piper and Justin Taylor	<i>Session 2</i>
3	Chapter 6—The Sovereignty of God and Ethnic-based Suffering Carl F. Ellis, Jr.	<i>Session 3</i>
4	Chapter 2—"All the Good that Is Ours in Christ": Seeing God's Gracious Hand in the Hurts Others Do to Us Mark Talbot	<i>No Video</i>
5	Chapter 2 (continued)	<i>Session 4</i>
6	Chapter 7—God's Grace and Your Sufferings David Powlison	<i>Session 5</i>
7	Chapter 5—Sovereignty, Suffering, and the Work of Missions Steve Saint Chapter 4—Why God Appoints Suffering for His Servants John Piper	<i>Session 6</i>
8	Chapter 9—Hope . . . The Best of Things Joni Eareckson Tada	<i>Session 7</i>
9	Chapter 8—Waiting for the Morning during the Long Night of Weeping Dustin Shramek	<i>No Video</i>
10	Chapter 3—The Suffering of Christ and the Sovereignty of God John Piper	<i>Session 8</i>

Chapter 1— Suffering and the Sovereignty of God: Ten Aspects of God’s Sovereignty Over Suffering and Satan’s Hand in It

- 1) Restate Wells’ critique of contemporary evangelicalism in your own words (p. 17). Do you think this is a warranted critique? Give evidence to support your answer.
- 2) Why is it significant that the contributors of this book have all known real suffering in their lives (p. 18)? What credibility, if any, does it add to what they have to say?
- 3) What does the author mean when he says that God is sovereign? (p. 18–19)
- 4) **When the Bible calls Satan “the ruler of this world” (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11) or “the god of this world” (2 Cor. 4:4) or “the prince of the power of the air” (Eph. 2:2), or a “cosmic power over this present darkness” (Eph. 6:12), what should we assume about his authority in this world? Why should we not assume that his authority is absolute, in the sense that he can do whatever he wants? See pp. 19–20.**
- 5) What is so amazing about the fact that the demons obeyed Jesus in Mark 1:27? What does this imply about Jesus? (pp. 20–21)
- 6) Why do you think the apostle Peter describes Satan as a roaring lion prowling about? In what ways should this affect how we think about the devil? In what ways should this affect how we think about the Christian life and our own sanctification? (pp. 21–22)
- 7) **Why might the apostle James consider as arrogant and boastful someone who says, “Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and make profit” (James 4:13ff.)? (p. 22)**
- 8) **Many people might not consider the fact that God chooses when a person will die as being a reason for celebration. Why do you think it is indeed a source of great joy and comfort?**
- 9) Was Job right in attributing the natural disaster that took his children’s lives to God’s sovereign activity? How can this be if God told Satan to afflict Job? (pp. 23–24)
- 10) Why does the author say it is it a “small comfort to focus on the freedom of Satan to destroy” (p. 23)?
- 11) How can the apostle James call the Lord compassionate and merciful in his dealings with Job when we learn from the book of Job that God is responsible for the loss of Job’s children? (p. 24)
- 12) What can we be confident God will give us in response to our requests (consider Matt. 7:7–11)?
- 13) What does the biblical imagery that pictures Satan as a lion and a dragon and serpent imply about Satan’s power and his ways? (p. 25)
- 14) What can’t Satan make animals and plants do? (pp. 25–26)
- 15) What two famous instances of temptation by Satan does the author talk about? How is Satan’s power and freedom described in these two instances? (pp. 26–27)
- 16) What must Satan do to bring someone into the lake of fire and sulfur with him? What is his most deadly weapon? (p. 27)
- 17) What act of God is compared in 2 Corinthians 4:6 with God’s sovereign power over Satan’s ability to blind minds?
- 18) In what two ways does Satan enslave people? (p. 28)

- 19) What does it mean that evil and suffering are not ultimate? What does it mean that God is? (p. 29)
- 20) In this chapter, how has the author shown that God is sovereign over all things? What has he used to show this? What does this imply about the importance and function of Scripture?

- 21) In answering the question, “Where is God?” at the hanging of the three men, what does Elie Wiesel mean by saying, “This is where—hanging here from this gallows” (p. 34)? Think of as many reasons as you can as to why this is a natural human conclusion in the face of grotesque suffering.
- 22) What is your reaction to reading Wiesel’s experience? What thoughts or questions does it bring to mind about suffering? About evil? About God?
- 23) What difficult situations or experiences in your life have caused you or are now causing you to ask, “Why did God allow that?”
- 24) Restate in your own words the main questions the author wants to answer in this chapter. (p. 36)
- 25) **What is Open Theism? What are its main concerns? What is most valuable to God in the Open Theist framework? (pp. 36–37)**
- 26) The author explains that at one point in his life he “concluded that God had to put up with all kinds of things that he did not like in order to preserve our freedom” (p. 40). Why does he think this is a natural way for us to think about God’s relationship to evil?
- 27) What does the author say is not natural to think concerning God’s relation to evil? (p. 40)
- 28) Does Gregory Boyd’s thinking “strike you as badly” as it strikes the author (p. 40)? Why or why not? Why is the author troubled by such thinking?
- 29) What can we conclude about God’s relationship to evil from Genesis 18:25 and Deuteronomy 32:4? (p. 41)
- 30) Is there anything in the context of Ephesians 1:11 which would suggest that the “all things” that God brings about should be limited to something other than all things absolutely? How about in the other passages listed by the author: Exodus 9:13–16; John 9:3; Hebrews 12:3–11; James 1:2–4? What is the specific nature of the things these last texts focus on? (p. 42)
- 31) In Isaiah 46:9, what is the point of God saying that he declares the end from the beginning and that he will accomplish all his purpose, right after saying that there is no other God besides himself? (pp. 42–43; see also n. 17)
- 32) If the apostle Paul can assume that his fellow Jewish Christians believed that God works all things after the counsel of his will, what then can we assume Paul believed the Old Testament Scriptures taught concerning God’s relationship to evil? What Old Testament Scriptures might have formed his thinking about this? (pp. 42–44; see also n. 18)
- 33) How does the author handle the OT texts which Open Theists use to support their position? What explanation does he give for how he views these texts? (pp. 43–44; see also n. 18)
- 34) **The author uses many different verses to show that “it is not inappropriate to take God to be the creator, the sender, the permitter, and sometimes even the instigator of evil.” What are a few verses which show God’s role in natural disasters and diseases? In sending evil spirits? In sending human agents of destruction? In permitting and even moving others to do evil? Explain the various reasons why each of verses supports the author’s view. (pp. 43–47)**
- 35) How does the author reconcile 2 Samuel 24:1, which says that the Lord incited king David to take a census of the people, with 1 Chronicles 21:1, which says that Satan incited king David to do this? (p. 46; see n. 25)

- 36) **At the end of the author's survey of the biblical testimony to God relationship with evil on page 47, what does he conclude must be believed about God and evil?**
- 37) What does it mean that God "ordains" something? (p. 47; see also n. 26)
- 38) What key question, arising out of the conclusions made in section entitled "Scripture's General Perspective on God's Relationship to Evil," does the author seek to answer in section entitled "Human Freedom and Responsibility"? (p. 47)
- 39) Define free-will libertarianism. (p. 48)
- 40) Try to explain in your own words the distinction between "freedom of the will" and "freedom of choice." (pp. 48–49; see also n. 31)
- 41) What is the crucial point to see in all these minute definitions and distinctions of free-will libertarianism and freedom of will and freedom of choice? (p. 49)
- 42) Explain what it is that Open Theists believe but not all other free-will theists believe, which causes them to conclude that God cannot exhaustively and conclusively know the future. (pp. 49–50)
- 43) Why do you think the author determines only to address one issue in this section—to seek whether Scripture hold's humans accountable for actions which God has foreordained and foreknown—even though there are numerous other philosophical and theological questions which also could be dealt with? (p. 50)
- 44) What is so significant about the crowd's reaction to the apostle Peter's sermon in Acts 2:22–23? (p. 51)
- 45) Describe what Jesus does at the Last Supper that illustrates man's responsibility for evils which God has foreknown. (pp. 51–52)
- *****
- 46) What grammatical observation does the author make to show that Herod, Pilate, etc., were the specific individuals predestined by God to accomplish his will in the crucifixion? (p. 53; see n. 39)
- 47) Based upon the survey of texts in the section entitled "Human Freedom and Responsibility," what does the author conclude remains true alongside God's foreordaining and foreknowing of all things? (p. 54)
- 48) Recall and review the distinction between freedom of will and freedom of choice discussed earlier [[see Question 40 above](#)]. Define, in your own words, freedom of choice. Then list five texts where freedom of choice is shown in Scripture.
- 49) **What is the deepest and most crucial level of our existence—of who we are—that Scripture denies we are able to determine for ourselves? What verses show this to be true? How does knowing this refute a belief in the freedom of will that free-will libertarians claim is necessary for us to have? (pp. 56–57)**
- 50) What are the "evil, determining influences" upon spiritually dead people that the apostle Paul lists in Ephesians 2:1–3? Describe, in your own words, each of these. See O'brien's comments for help. (p. 57; see also n. 42)
- 51) How is the bondage under Egypt analogous to our plight and need for divine intervention in life? (pp. 58–59)
- 52) What two things does God always use when he creates faith in our hearts? (p. 59)
- 53) When in our lives does the author say true freedom can be ours? Why does he say this? (pp. 59–60)
- 54) What punishment does Ephesians 2:3 say is rightly upon all who remain slaves to sin, even though they have no free will in the libertarian sense? (p. 60)

- 55) **Using your own words, explain why the author says that at first glance the free-will libertarian reasoning seems quite plausible. What is wrong with such reasoning, as the author points out in n. 47? What is wrong with limiting our available choices in any decision only to the desires and wants we have at the time of that particular decision? (pp. 60–61)**
- 56) Explain what the author means in n. 48 by a “primary inclination.” How does understanding the “primary inclination” show that there can be “no such thing as freedom of the will at the most fundamental level of human being”? Why is it impossible for a person to choose for himself what his primary inclination will be? (p. 61)
- 57) **Which of Joseph’s claims is absolutely crucial for us to understand “if we are to understand the relationship between God’s will and our wills, between God’s ordaining that someone will do some evil act and some human being’s actually doing it” (p. 63)? Why?**
- 58) How does the author demonstrate that the “it” that God meant for good is the very “evil” which the brothers meant? (pp. 63–64)
- 59) List the biblical examples of events with dual causes attributed to them, such as Joseph’s being sold into slavery, which the author highlights (pp. 64–65). Can you think of any others?
- 60) **Restate, in your own words, the point of the first paragraph in the section entitled “God’s Will and Our Wills.” How is it “that God creates, sends, permits, and even moves others to do evil while never doing evil himself”? (pp. 66–67)**
- 61) In the end, what does the author conclude is the biblical view of suffering and evil? (p. 68)
- 62) What does the author mean by “secondary” or “proximate” causes? See also n. 55. Who is the primary cause of all things? (p. 68)
- 63) What is the author’s answer to how one event can have two complete explanations? What can and can’t we understand about these things? (pp. 69–70)
- 64) What is meant by a “category mistake”? How should we avoid a category mistake in our thinking about God’s agency and our agency? (pp. 69–70)
- 65) Scripture tells us that both divine and human agency must be fully affirmed in any particular act. Why does Scripture not tell us *how* this can be so? (p. 70)
- 66) At the end of the day, what is the ultimate cause of suffering and evil in this world, beyond any doubt for Christians? (p. 71–72)
- 67) What can we be sure of for those who commit evil? (p. 72)
- 68) What can we be sure is the ultimate goal of all God’s planning and working, even though we cannot be sure of the ways particular sufferings and evils work into that ultimate goal? (p. 72)
- 69) What is the point of including, at the end of the chapter, one of the Bible’s bleakest descriptions of pain and agony and suffering? How should knowing 2 Corinthians 11:23–29 cause us to understand Romans 8:31–39? (p. 75)
- 70) **Near the close of the chapter the author says, “I would not pretend to tell someone who has been sexually abused as a child how God means that evil for her good” (p. 76). Based upon the conclusions drawn in this chapter, why would this sentence be wise advice for counseling? What should our goal as counselors be in helping others through dark seasons of pain?**

Chapter 3—The Suffering of Christ and the Sovereignty of God

- 71) What is the author's two-fold purpose in this chapter? (p. 81)
- 72) **What does the author mean by the paralyzing effects of discouragement, self-pity, fear, and pride? How do these things paralyze us? (p. 81)**
- 73) What does the author say is the ultimate reason the universe exists? (p. 81)
- 74) **List as many biblical texts you can think of that support this reason for the universe's existence.**
- 75) What attribute of God causes his glory to shine most brightly? Why do you think this is? (pp. 81–82)
- 76) **What is the supreme manifestation in history of the glory of the grace of God? What shocking implication does this have on the existence of suffering in the world? (p. 82)**
- 77) What would be wrong with thinking that the death of Christ was God's plan B? (p. 82)
- 78) According to Revelation 13:8, when did God plan the crucifixion of Jesus? Why must we not think of suffering in the world as an afterthought which was not part of God's original plan? (pp. 82–83)
- 79) What must have been necessary to be included in the plan of God before the ages began if he also planned before the ages began to give us grace in Christ? Why? (p. 83)
- 80) What is significant about the word "slain" in Revelation 13:8? (p. 83)
- 81) What is the significance of God choosing us "in Christ" and adopting us "through Christ" before the foundation of the world, especially as it relates to the existence of suffering in the world? How does the author show this to be the case? (p. 84)
- 82) What will be "the centerpiece of worship in heaven for all eternity"? What two texts does this come from? (pp. 84–85)
- 83) **Reflect on the author's statement: "It is not sinful in God to will that there be sin" (p. 85). List all the things you can think of that bother you about this statement. List all the things you can think of that are comforting and encouraging and awe-inspiring about this statement.**
- 84) To what biblical event and interpretation of that event does the author compare the Fall? (p. 85)
- 85) What entered the world through Adam and Eve's sin? (pp. 85–86)
- 86) What does it mean that the world was subjected to futility? (p. 86)
- 87) Explain, in your own words, the meaning of Lamentations 3:32–33. (p. 86)
- 88) **How would you explain God's declarations in Ezekiel 33:11 and Lamentations 3:32–33 that he does not delight in suffering in light of knowing that God himself ordains that suffering in his sovereign will?**
- 89) List each of the seven achievements of Christ's suffering that the author presents, and under each write a prayer of praise to God and Christ for their wisdom, power, grace, and glory in that achievement. (pp. 87–89)
- 90) What is the only weapon Satan can wield that can damn us to hell? (p. 88)

Chapter 4—Why God Appoints Suffering for His Servants

- 91) What purifying effect did the apostle Paul's affliction, described in 2 Corinthians 1:8–9, have on him? (pp. 91–92)
- 92) Explain the statement, “Suffering is a primary means of building compassion into the lives of God’s servants” (p. 92). How does suffering build compassion?**
- 93) According to 2 Corinthians 4:17, how do present sufferings affect future glory for Christians?
- 94) What seems to be the reason Jesus calls those who are persecuted on his account blessed? (p. 94)
- 95) Explain why Edwards believes there will be differing degrees of happiness and glory in heaven. Cite the verses he uses to support this claim. (pp. 94–95)
- 96) Why will those with lesser degrees of happiness in heaven not begrudge or feel any ill-will toward those who have higher degrees of happiness? Why will the greater happiness of others actually advance and deepen the happiness of those with lesser degrees? (pp. 94–95)
- 97) How does the apostle Paul fill up “what is lacking in Christ's afflictions”? (p. 98)
- 98) How can we see God's missionary strategy at work in allowing great persecution to fall upon the church after Stephen's murder? (pp. 100–101)
- 99) What often neglected lesson does the author want us to be aware of when it comes to God's strategic use of suffering? (pp. 101–102)
- 100) Why do you think prosperity might be more devastating than persecution to the mission God calls us to? (pp. 101–102)**
- 101) Why shouldn't we conclude from the things talked about in this chapter that we should seek persecution? (p. 102)
- 102) Ultimately, what is suffering meant to reveal? Describe various ways it does this and cite Scripture to support your answers. (p. 106–109)**
- 103) Explain the statement, “Gratitude for gifts does not prove that the giver is precious” (p. 109). Knowing this, what goes into demonstrating that the giver is precious?
- 104) How is hope made visible? Why would people ask what we hope in? (p. 109)

Chapter 5—Sovereignty, Suffering, and the Work of Missions

- 105) Explain what the author means when he says that suffering is relative. (p. 111)
- 106) What is the author convinced is the reason why Jesus suffered in every way that we do? (p. 112)**
- 107) How can a lack of suffering be a great obstacle to missions and ministry to hurting people? (p. 113)
- 108) What does the author say suffering has cultivated in his life? (p. 114)
- 109) What parts of Steve Saint's testimony affected you the most? Why?**
- 110) How does the suffering Steve Saint has experienced reflect the purposes for suffering that Piper talks about in chapters 3 and 4?

Chapter 6—The Sovereignty of God and Ethnic-Based Suffering

- 111) Based upon the whole chapter, come up with a concise definition of ethnic-based suffering? How is it distinct from suffering in general? What distinguishes it from other types of relational suffering?
- 112) What does the author say Adam and Eve were attempting in eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil? Why does he think this is so? (p. 123)
- 113) What does the author mean by “creature-ism”? (pp. 123–124)
- 114) Try to explain in your own words what the author means by “human power differentials” and “human power struggles.” Why are there no power struggles between the Persons of the godhead? (p. 124)
- 115) Why do you think the author says Adam’s response to God in Genesis 3:12 illustrates an inequality? Why do you or don’t you find this a helpful way to view what was at work in this response? (p. 124)
- 116) What else, besides human power struggles, does the author point out was a result of the Fall, and how is this manifested in the early chapters of Genesis? (pp. 124–125)
- 117) According to the author, who do the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent represent on an individual level? On a collective level? What dimension does this add to the author’s argument thus far? (p. 125)
- 118) What does the book of Job clearly demonstrate about the relationship between our sin and our suffering? Explain the way in which the author means suffering is a mystery. (pp. 125–126)
- 119) How can the clear lesson from Job (from the previous question) be reconciled with the author’s statement, “The cause of suffering is sin”? What are the two general categories of how sin causes suffering? (p. 126)**
- 120) How does the author define oppression? Why doesn’t the author narrowly define oppression only in terms of race? What, according to the author, drives oppression? According to the author, how does oppression affect individual victims? (pp. 126–127)
- 121) What is the author saying about the responsibility of the oppressed for the bad decisions they make? How, if at all, does he address the responsibility of the oppressor? (pp. 126–127)
- 122) What are the various ways creature-ism applies itself in the world? (p. 127)
- 123) How did Israel sinfully view themselves? How did God want them to view themselves and their identity? (pp. 127–128)
- 124) In Acts 13:14–48, at what point do the Jews respond negatively to the apostle Paul’s preaching? What is this a manifestation of according to the author? Why do you or don’t you agree with this comparison? (p. 128)
- 125) At what point in Acts 21:27–22:24 do the Jews get furious at apostle Paul? What does the author see this as evidence of; what does he see as coming into question? (pp. 129–130)
- 126) Where does the author see all ethnic-based suffering stemming from, and why does he say this must not be ignored if we are to solve the problem? Do you agree with him? Why or why not? (pp. 129–130)
- 127) What is the author’s definition of marginalization? What is the author saying about the moral value of marginalization? Is marginalization always wrong? Why or why not? Is every subdominant group oppressed or marginalized in the way the author describes, and if not, which ones are not? (pp. 130–131)**

- 128) Why does viewing marginalization, as it relates to ethnic-based suffering, only through the lens of racism muddy the waters in truly getting to the heart of the matter? Why is it important to understand that marginalization may occur quite distinct from “racist” motives? (pp. 130–131)
- 129) Describe the three types of racism illustrated in the stories of Ms. Jones on pp. 131–134. In what ways, if any, do you think these illustrations are valid and enlightening? In what ways, if any, are they unhelpful or misleading?
- 130) Do you agree with the author that the examples of Israel in Egypt reveal an internalized oppression that had landed on the Israelites? Why or why not? (pp. 134–135)
- 131) What must we do in order to minister to the suffering and the oppressed, and if we are to follow Jesus’ example? (p. 135)
- 132) What does Cornelius Van Til call us to do? Why might this be surprising to many people in the church today? (pp. 136–137)**
- 133) Has the author shown in this chapter that a dominant/sub-dominant dynamic in human relationship, whatever the relationship, is necessarily evil? Defend your answer. Do you think a dominant/sub-dominant dynamic is evil in every human relationship? Why or why not?
- 134) What does the author mean by “cultural, core concerns”? (p. 137)
- 135) Try your best to explain the following event from a dominant culture perspective and then from a sub-dominant culture perspective: An African-American walks into a store and the clerk instinctively watches him more closely than the rest of the customers.
- 136) How might a failure to understand the doxological dimension of spirituality contribute to an inability to make progress in the realm of ethnic-based suffering? (pp. 138–139)
- 137) What about the author’s dichotomy between salvific and doxological motivations in life is helpful? What about it may be incomplete or misleading? (pp. 138–139)
- 138) Why should identification with suffering be as natural as breathing for Christians? (p. 140)**
- 139) According to Isaiah 58:6–8, against what backdrop will the light of God’s people shine forth in this world? (pp. 140–141)
- 140) What is the ultimate purpose of ethnicity? (p. 141)**

- 141) What is significant about the anonymity of “How Firm a Foundation”? (p. 148)
- 142) Why is it important to recognize the point of view of this hymn? (pp 148–150)
- 143) Explain why the author says, “A sufferer’s primal need is to hear God talking and to experience him purposefully at work” (p. 149). Why is this the primal need over any other thing?
- 144) Reflect upon the statement: “What more can he say than to you he has said?” Do you wish he had said more? What and why? What does the author want us to feel with this statement? What should we be looking for? (pp. 150–151)**
- 145) What does it mean to be a “saint” of the Lord? (pp. 151–152)
- 146) What is implied about us and about God when we take refuge in him? (pp. 152–153)
- 147) Describe some dishonest reactions to suffering. What are the two ends of the spectrum that the author describes? Which end do you tend to go toward? Why? (pp. 153–154)**
- 148) What makes it hard for you to hear the weight and peace and comfort and hope of God’s promises?
- 149) Explain what the sinful *curvitas in se* is, and describe how the Psalms and Jesus illustrate the opposite attitude. (p. 155)
- 150) What is the doubled pain that suffering often brings? Have you experienced this before? When and how? (pp. 156–158)
- 151) Why is God’s promise to be with you a more active promise than simply a promise of providing comfort? What besides comforting you will he do in your suffering? What does this imply about the cause of suffering? (pp. 158–159)
- 152) Describe some common “misapplications” of God’s sovereignty. How will recognizing these misapplications affect how you understand your own sufferings and help others in the midst of suffering? (p. 160)**
- 153) What does the author mean when he says David’s supplications to God for deliverance are not “sedate”? How were Jesus’ pleas to God of the same nature? How do we honestly entrust our soul to a faithful and sovereign God? (pp. 160–161)**
- 154) What are the three designs of God in your suffering? (pp. 162–163)
- 155) Usually we are right to separate suffering from sins; in what way does the author want us to think of their relation? How does our sin as Christians become an affliction also? Why is this not justifying or excusing our sin? (pp. 163–164)**
- 156) Why is fearless endurance more than a lessened sense of anxiety? Why is fearless endurance ultimately for the purpose of wise love? (p. 165–166)
- 157) Explain how true compassion and wise counsel both go into a truly wise love. What happens when one or the other is missing? (pp. 165–166)
- 158) What are many of the significant sufferings that come particularly with growing older? What promises does God give for these unique sufferings? (pp. 167–169)

- 159) How do death and sin testify to a hellish enemy? Why are people often unsuspecting of the enemy in spite of these indicators? (pp. 169–170)
- 160) Describe, in your own words, the statement, “The drama of evil occasions the revelation of good” (p. 170). How does this happen? What is the ultimate good that gives us hope in the face of evil and suffering? Why?

- 161) Explain why you think minimizing our pain in suffering results in a failure to love others and a failure to honor God.**
- 162) Can you identify with Dustin and Kellie's pain at losing their son? How?
- 163) How did Dustin and Kellie feel when they heard true and right things from others in this time? Why do you think they felt this way? What did they need in those days and months? (p. 177)
- 164) What is the author's two-fold hope for this chapter? (p. 177)
- 165) What are the various reasons why pain and grief are not commonly confronted in an honest way? What obstacles, in our culture and in our own hearts, stand in the way of an honest confrontation with our pain? (pp. 178–179)**
- 166) What causes you to avoid truly facing the pain of suffering in your life or in other people's lives?
- 167) What does the author mean by saying we must "validate and give voice to the depth of pain" (p. 180)? How does Psalm 88 demonstrate this?**
- 168) How many verses in Psalm 88 have a sense of hope? Why is this so amazing?
- 169) What is the most surprising part of Psalm 88 for you? What part do you identify with most? Why?
- 170) Have you communicated with God the way the psalmist does in Psalm 88? If so, when? If not, why?**
- 171) How does the author explain the reason such honest and horrible pain is in the Bible? (p. 184)
- 172) Explain why Jesus' suffering and pain is even more remarkable than that expressed in Psalm 88. (pp. 185–186)
- 173) Why is the depth of Jesus' pain so significant for us? (p. 186)**
- 174) What makes Jesus' statement, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" so astounding? (p. 186)
- 175) What belief expressed in the context of Psalm 22 gives us an extremely important insight into the way David and Jesus faced the pain of suffering in their lives? (pp. 186–187)
- 176) What do the seraphim see and believe about God that causes them to cry out, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts"? In what two ways does the holiness of God help us in suffering? (pp. 187–188)**
- 177) What types of questions about God's character and purposes do you think haunted Dustin and his wife after the death of their son, Owen? (p. 188)
- 178) What question continually came back to confront them whenever they were tempted to turn away from God? (p. 188)
- 179) How does the tremendous suffering and pain that Dustin and his wife experienced demonstrate the loving and severe purpose of God?
- 180) What reason does God give in telling us not to fear in Isaiah 43:1–3? (pp. 188–189)

- 181) Why does the author say that hope is hard to come by? What makes hope hard for you? (pp. 191–194)
- 182) What does the author mean by “making sin our own”? What sins do you make your own? How? (p. 193)**
- 183) What did God do to break the author while she lay in the hospital? What did it cause her to do? How was it a 2 Corinthians 1:8 experience? (pp. 193–194)
- 184) How often does the author struggle with desperation and suffering? Why does she want us to know this? (pp. 194–195)
- 185) What calling from Christ do we share with the author? (p. 195)
- 186) According to the author, who are the truly handicapped people? Why is this so? (pp. 195–196)
- 187) Who are the humble? What does this imply about the purpose for suffering? (p. 196)
- 188) What does it mean to take up our cross daily and follow Christ? (p. 196)**
- 189) What happens as a result of this type of cross-bearing and Christ-following? (p. 196)
- 190) Describe the process of meeting joy on God’s terms. (pp. 197–198)
- 191) What does it mean that we are the fragrance of Christ to God? (p. 198)
- 192) How might someone use their suffering as an excuse to sin? How can we battle this temptation? (p. 198)**
- 193) Why does the author say we are so rich? What callings does this wealth bring upon us? (p. 199)**
- 194) Explain the statement, “Misery might love company, but joy craves a crowd” (p. 202).**
- 195) Why does the author hope she can bring her wheelchair to heaven? (p. 203)

- 196) Why would not praying for healing also be a wasting of your cancer? How should Christians pray when they suffer?**
- 197) Explain the following sentences: “Satan is real and causes many pleasures and pains. But he is not ultimate” (p. 208). How is cancer wasted by failing to understand God as the designer of it?
- 198) What would stoicism, dishonesty, and artificial buoyancy look like as responses to cancer? What types of responses would a biblical faith in God’s design produce? Why does biblical faith in God’s design produce these other responses? (p. 208)**
- 199) What other verses can you think of that describe suffering and pain as a gift besides the ones listed on p. 209?
- 200) What does God do for us, with us, and through us in our suffering? (p. 209)
- 201) What other things, besides odds, tend to distract us from trusting in God? How should Christians view things like odds? (See pp. 209–210.)**
- 202) What do “Be Still My Soul” and “How Firm a Foundation” reckon as 100% certain? (p. 210)
- 203) What obstacles in today’s world get in the way of an honest reflection upon death? What in your own life and heart get in the way of your reflection upon death?
- 204) Cancer is a signpost pointing to what? (pp. 210–211)
- 205) What are Satan’s and God’s design in your cancer? (p. 211)
- 206) How are dire need and utter joy expressed in faith? (pp. 211–212)**
- 207) What is the bent of your heart—if you were diagnosed with cancer, would you have a greater desire to know more about cancer or to know more of God? How would you battle unbelief in such a circumstance?
- 208) What does Powlison mean by saying the conversation can easily get “stuck” on the cancer? How can we change the direction of the conversation in a way that honors God and loves people? (pp. 212–213)
- 209) In what ways can we guard ourselves from an unhealthy introversion in our cancer? (p. 213)
- 210) Explain how, “A great, life-threatening weakness can prove amazingly freeing” (p. 213).
- 211) How might grieving without hope express itself? How might grieving with hope express itself? (See p. 214.)
- 212) How might the Christian hope actually make the sufferings of this life more keenly felt? (pp. 214–215)
- 213) Describe the difference between battling against cancer and battling with cancer. (p. 215)
- 214) What goes into facing life and death on God’s terms? (pp. 215–216)
- 215) How could you use cancer as a means to witness to the glory of Christ? (pp. 216–217)**