

Rediscovering the Story of the Old Testament – Session 2 Lesson 8

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Main Idea

Yahweh suffers with us more than we know, even from the violence He permits.

Exercise

Why does suffering seem to be a part what it means to love someone?

Core questions

- How do our emotions flow out of the emotions God experiences?
- How is love linked to our suffering?
- Why does our suffering lead to God's violence?

Suffering and the Violence of Yahweh

Yahweh wanted creatures in His image, creatures that He could have a _____ relationship with, creatures that would be able to _____ to be in that relationship and to be able to freely _____ with love. To be in a loving relationship these creatures would require two characteristics:

1. To be people that are in _____ requires _____ emotions. Relationships require non-preprogrammed responses between one person and another.
2. To be people that can love requires the _____ to choose to _____ or not love, that is the freedom to choose to freely _____ of oneself to another. The corollary of that, is that the ability to love requires the freedom to choose to not love.

Even for Yahweh, the choice to be in relationship is a choice to be _____, to be open to being received or _____. So when these creatures chose to not love, to _____ against his love, Yahweh _____ the _____ of rejection. Despite that, Yahweh still chose to stay with His plan and chose to create a pathway by which these creatures could be _____ to a loving relationship with Him.

The rebellion also meant that they would _____. In their vulnerability, they experienced the _____ of _____ relationships with each other and with Yahweh. The brokenness caused them to suffer _____ for _____ those relationships. And yet, Yahweh still chose to _____ – even though their suffering caused His suffering as well.

For Yahweh to continue pursue a _____ relationship with creatures in rebellion, meant that He could not retract the _____ that would _____ them to love. But that would also mean that until the loving relationship is _____, those broken creatures would continue their rebellious ways, causing continual _____, rejection and _____, both for themselves and for Yahweh.

In the Presence of Mystery

Often, as we strive to _____ suffering, we seek knowledge - to know the _____ of suffering. But in seeking the “why,” we face a _____. We look at each situation of suffering and ask why now, why this person, and why in this circumstance. And if sometimes we think we have an answer, we have to deal with the fact that there is _____ we don't know.

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We need _____ to understand not just the _____ of suffering but the mystery that is God. In the end, we discover that what we need most is not an answer but a _____. As we contemplate the mystery of suffering, we should not rest in opinions or dogma but humbly accept that just as there are answers we may only know _____, that we can know the One who knows the answers. Even then we can only partly know the One who Himself will always partly be a Mystery. We need to see imprint of God on creation and in his creatures. We need to learn to _____ God Himself more than we need to seek _____ about God.

- Just as in the Japanese art form, _____, when _____ pottery is made more _____ by being fixed with a lacquer of gold, silver or platinum, it is after we _____ and are _____, that God's _____ touch can make us more _____ than we were before.
- Many times, the Hebrew word for good, _____ refers to things that _____ their purpose. Rather than self-centeredly thinking that something is good if it is _____ to us, we should think for God's viewpoint if something is fulfilling its _____.
- Instead of simply doing what He knows is best, Yahweh obliges Himself to _____ and _____ to us as imperfect as our prayers might be.
- Yahweh has chosen to _____ His power, at times limiting His power to the will of His vice-regents and at times _____ those _____ that are carried out by His vice-regents.
- Reflecting the Trinity, our _____ reflects both our _____ personhood and the _____ of all who belong to the Trinity, and both our _____ nature and our _____ nature. It means that we do not suffer alone and that we also suffer with the suffering of others.

The Pathos of Yahweh

We fully reflect the image of Yahweh in our ability to _____ to _____ or not love and in our ability to experience _____, not just the _____ emotions but also the _____ emotions such as jealousy, emotional pain, and anger. We differ from Yahweh in that sometimes our emotions control us but Yahweh's emotions are always under control.

- When we feel that Yahweh has forsaken us. It is not that Yahweh has forgotten us or is no longer compassionate or gracious or is no longer around, but _____ is _____ his _____ to allow for human _____ to be fully expressed.
- Yahweh _____ when we _____, even when our suffering is caused directly because of our _____ and he uses our suffering to bring us back to Him.
- Because we are made in the image of Yahweh, His _____ are reflected in our attributes. We have emotions because Yahweh has _____.
- Although it sounds a little strange to our ears, Jesus is the Son of _____. This means that we cannot _____ the activity of _____ from the activity of _____.
- No mystery is greater than how the One who exists _____ of _____ and from before _____, encumbered himself in a _____ body and while in that human body, _____ being rejected, despised, _____, spit upon, and _____ to death; enduring all this treatment by the very people He came to offer forgiveness to and restore to Himself.

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- In a remarkable statement, we are told that “he learned _____ from what he suffered.”

Completeness in Suffering

As we explore different aspects of our own suffering, we can know that whatever the circumstances, Yahweh _____ with us.

- The hope that the Christian has is that no matter the circumstance, Yahweh is able to use whatever bad or _____ circumstance we _____, _____ it into something that can work for the good of the believer.
- Just as for Jesus who suffered before He received His glory, our sufferings and _____ are not meaningless but will precede our _____.
- In the same way that Jesus became _____ through His _____, we also can become complete through our suffering. Yahweh can _____ our _____ and direct it for our benefit or for the benefit of those around us. (Rom 8:28).
- It is through suffering that we can _____ in _____ and _____, become transformed more into the likeness of the One we desire to follow.
- We are called into the community of Christ, to be in _____ and _____ with all His followers, to _____ in their _____ and to weep with those who weep. Within that fellowship we can become _____, to become more like Christ in this life, that in this life we weep with those who weep so that in the next life we can rejoice with those who rejoice.
- Throughout history the _____ has _____ the poor and sick, rescued people from the streets and established hospitals.
- What in the world’s eyes seems broken, is part of _____ of great _____; that Yahweh can take our brokenness and _____ us, _____ us more into His image.
- It is easy for us to think of that suffering as a distraction, but it is through those means that Yahweh can grab our attention.
- When Yahweh allows _____ things happen in life, it is not to punish us but to _____ us to himself.
- Our _____ comes through our _____ and suffering which makes us dependent on Jesus, who is then free to show His power without our mistaking His power for ours.
- The _____ and persecution of the _____ is not a sign of Yahweh’s displeasure, but a sign of their _____ in Christ, that as we become more like Christ then they suffer like Him.
- When we are in comfortable circumstances, we can question how strong our faith truly is. Our _____ can be tested and _____ when we find ourselves in circumstances where we run out of our own resources and need to depend on Yahweh.
- In a Central American prison women responded to the story of Hagar (Genesis 16), a woman who found that Yahweh had seen her in the midst of her suffering.

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The Strange Work of Yahweh¹

Exodus 34:5-7 ⁵ Then the Lord came down in the cloud and stood there with him and proclaimed his name, the Lord. ⁶ And he passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, “The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, ⁷ maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children and their children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation.”

People sometimes misunderstand Exodus 34:5-7, focusing on the _____ that the God of the Old Testament is a _____ God compared to the New Testament. But notice that the verse is mostly _____ on things like _____ and mercy. The last part of the verse is actually talking about the _____ of sins that carry through from one _____ to the next. In the meantime, the verse balances that with the mercy shown to thousands. And then elsewhere, God expresses the _____ that all people will _____ from their sinful ways and turn _____ to him because He desires to have a relationship with all people in which love is given and received.

Yahweh _____ when we experience _____, and He _____ in _____ as he seeks _____ for us. His anger is not a part of his character but is a response to the injustice we suffer.

The God portrayed in the Old Testament is not different from that in the New Testament. Even Jesus did not totally avoid violence.

It is for _____ that we were created in Yahweh’s _____, that Yahweh _____ with us in our suffering, that _____ Yahweh’s _____ when our suffering is due to injustice and causes Yahweh to invoke violence.

Reframing Yahweh’s violence: A case study, the conquest of Canaan

Israel’s conquest of Canaan brings up a variety of issues associated with Yahweh’s _____ of and _____ of _____. Studying this conquest provides an opportunity to study the various issues dealing with the violence we attribute to Yahweh.

The Bible is not a universal moral rule book, nor a book of genocide. The _____ language of the Old Testament hides the fact that it is _____ literature. The narrative contains history of _____ people and _____ events, but it is not presented in the fashion of _____ history books. It is first and foremost a _____ text intended to _____ us to the person and the work of _____.

¹ Isaiah 28:21

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One aspect is that the Conquest narrative is a recapitulation of creation.²

Creation narrative	Exodus/Conquest narrative
Separating the waters so that dry land could appear	Crossing the Red Sea
Order is imposed on the waters of chaos. (In the ANE narrative, the great sea serpent is vanquished.)	Army of Pharaoh being destroyed. The Canaanites are chaos creatures.
Provide a place where God can dwell with humanity	Israel can “rest” in the land
Eden as a place where God dwells with his people	Canaan as a place where God dwells with his people
Angel guarding the way into the garden	Angel guarding the way into Canaan
In Adam’s deep sleep (<i>tardemah</i>), he had a vision of a woman being created from his side to serve with him in extending God’s kingdom into the world	In Abraham’s deep sleep (<i>tardemah</i>), he had a vision of his descendants being freed from slavery and extending God’s kingdom into the world

Yahweh’s violence questioned	
Point	Counterpoint
Israel suffered during siege of Babylon	if Israel and Judah had been obedient from the beginning, Yahweh would not have brought in the Assyrians and the Babylonians
Israel told to “totally destroy” (<i>herem</i>) Canaan	by the time the era of Judges arrives, there are still many Canaanites around that God intended to remain in order to bother the Israelites
Yahweh’s agents to bring justice used excessive violence	When Yahweh’s agents exceeded their authority, they also experienced justice
Innocent people suffer in war	Yahweh gives warnings to repent. Parents are Yahweh’s vice-regents over their children. Yahweh’s violence ultimately reduces ongoing suffering. Death is not the end and Yahweh will do what is right.
Verses like Ex 20:4-6 which speak of Yahweh’s “punishing” children to 3 rd and 4 th generation	“paqad” is best translated as “visiting” the children to further generations which typically experience the aftereffects of parental sins. In the meanwhile, Yahweh is merciful to the thousands who love him.

² John Walton, *Material or Function in Genesis 1? John Walton Responds*: Charles Russell, *Dancing in the Kingdom*, p. 64

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Lament: Holding grief and hope during suffering

The Bible is filled with _____. We see time and time again that when the God's people are faced with _____, injustice, oppression and turmoil, the Biblical response is often _____. Sometimes the lament is focused on _____, sometimes it is focused on _____.

(2 Chronicles 35:25; 2 Samuel 1:17-27; Psalm 10:1-4; 13:1-4; 102:1-2; Jeremiah 4:8; 7:29; Lamentations 7:29; 2:5; Micah 2:4; Esther 4:1; Matthew 2:16-18; John 11:31-33; Acts 8:2)

- In the midst of _____, when we feel like God has _____ us, we need to look to the _____. Jesus does understand our _____, and there are things we don't suffer because He suffered for us.
- Lament recognizes that beyond the _____ and _____ of current circumstances is Yahweh who _____ our prayers and who offers _____.
- We should not ignore the reality of the _____ that we and others are feeling. Yahweh _____ the suffering, too, and _____ that pain along with us and offers us the _____ of His presence.
- In our lament we can pray most _____ "thy kingdom come, thy will be done." Our pain makes us most aware of our _____, that the world is not as it _____ be, that we _____ for the Lord's return and for everything to be made _____.
- Until we and the earth are _____, the cause of lament, our _____, runs through each of us. Our lament should be shaped by the _____ that we and others have contributed to that suffering, but a lament that leads to _____ and the ultimate _____ we will fully experience in His presence when we are no longer encumbered by sin.

Lament: Trust and Let Go

In Lament, we trust _____. We trust that he knows our hearts. We trust that he forgives what we confess. We trust that he will respond to our needs.

In Lament, we let go of _____; we recognize that Yahweh knows everything. He knows our thoughts before we speak them. In Lament, we let our voice freely and honestly speak what we feel and do not try to hopelessly hide behind "sugar-coated" words.

In Lament, we let go of our _____. We do not control what Yahweh knows. We do not control what others do. We do not control our circumstances. We do not control our future or anyone else's. We let go. We let God.

In Lament, we let go of our _____. We do not hold on to our burdens but place our burdens in the arms of Yahweh and release them to his care. He holds our burdens, our emotions, our confidences, our suffering, our sins, our future,

After we open our hands and _____ of our hiding, our control and our burdens, our hands are now free to _____ onto the one we _____ and who knows our _____, our needs and our future.

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The Love that leads us to Lament and then will lead to Glory

Only by _____ the two Testaments that we can gain a _____ understanding of who God is and how we can better understand _____ part in Creation. We will still need to lean into _____ of God and how he has _____ us and will continue to shape us more into his _____; a process that is sometimes _____, but we are never _____.

Yahweh has created us to be in **relationship** with Himself, a relationship of love and emotion.

In Deuteronomy 6:5 we are told to _____ Yahweh with all our _____ and _____ and _____. *Ahav* has many dimensions from the _____ of husband to “provide for and protect” his family and neighbors to the _____, pleasurable feeling of sexual love. It encompasses our _____, _____ and _____, all of who we are. But the all-encompassing love we have is only a _____ to the all-surpassing love that Yahweh has for us. He _____ us with _____ of His being. And so it is with the _____ that we endure; we endure our suffering _____ with the One who loves us and suffers along with us.

Much of our _____ is due to the _____ and _____ we endure – and that invokes _____ from the One who cares for us. Yahweh _____ sin and injustice, because He does not want to take away the _____. He gave us so that we could truly _____ Him as He loves us. For that sake, He _____ His responses. He cannot totally ban injustice without revoking the freedom that allows us to love.

This _____ is not a primary attribute of Yahweh but is a response to the _____ that causes injustice. If there was no sin, there would be no anger. It is only because of our rebellion that our freedom has led to the sin that causes injustice and violence – and leads to Yahweh’s _____. And it is from that anger, that Yahweh sometimes uses _____ as a means to address the sin and violence in the world as a means to bring _____.

Yahweh did not revoke our _____ for the _____ of His creation, and He uses _____ to _____ of His _____. But because of our rebellious nature, the humans used to bring about justice often go _____ what they should do and yet bring about more _____ violence and injustice. And the cycle goes on – and will go on until Jesus returns to _____ establish His kingdom on earth.

In the meantime, our tragic situation leads us to _____. It is a lament we share with Yahweh, who _____ with us. Our lament recognizes that _____ runs through each of our hearts making us a _____ of the pain and suffering in the world. But our lament is not _____, because we still hold onto the hope that eventually _____ will be made _____. And so our lament is directed to the One who laments _____ us and who will ultimately bring about _____ and _____ the _____, including the sin in our own hearts.

And that is the hope we _____ to. The One who _____ us _____ to us. We suffer _____, lament together, love together, hope together – and someday we will _____ together when the _____ of Yahweh will finally be _____ in all His _____. And part of that glory will be in how Yahweh has shaped us more closely in His image.