

## Suffering and Sovereignty, Week 4

1. A healthy prayer life is central to enduring adversity. In the biblical perspective on prayer, we pray to build our relationship with God, to center ourselves on his eternal truths, and because the practice of prayer helps form Jesus in us. Where does this paradigm feel foreign to you? How does it differ from your daily practice of prayer?
2. Read Keller, beginning with “what if you fell in love” (p. 273, 3<sup>rd</sup> full par.), to the end of the excerpt on 275. Keller is discussing value of Job’s suffering. (a) In your experience, what causes a child’s love for a parent to deepen? (b) Keller and Lewis argue that suffering is *needed* to deepen our relationship with God. Our doubts say that suffering may lead to growth but might also cause emotional disability and even loss of faith. Would God really use a means of growth which might crush a person? Are Keller and Lewis just rationalizing the hard truth that life contains meaningless suffering?
3. Two-way communication is central to any healthy relationship, and prayer is our primary form of communication with God. How often do we hear from God? Listen to McCallum, “[The Thorn in the Flesh](#),” 15:00-20:00, which presents one believer’s experiences in this area. How do you hear from God?
4. Read Lamentations 3:12. Lamentations is written about a people suffering God’s righteous anger. Is it still relevant to us? Have you ever, when suffering, felt as the author does in 3:7-12?
5. Read Lamentations 3:22-33. The “steadfast love” of the Lord refers to God’s *hesed*, a Hebrew word for which there is no corresponding English word, but which combines elements of love, mercy and faithfulness. Read the attached passages involving God’s *hesed*. What aspect of *hesed* might justify the hope of 3:24?
6. Read Aubrey Sampson’s post “Praising God Saves Me In My Pain.” Sampson’s response to suffering depends in no way on meaning, or on hope that the suffering will end. What *does* it depend on? What does this mean and how does it address the question of *why* God allows us to suffer?
7. The title of Sampson’s article implies that her worship helps her endure suffering. When you have faced difficult times, which of these has offered the greatest solace?
  - a. Public worship
  - b. Private worship
  - c. Reading scripture
  - d. Studying scripture
  - e. Wine and good food (Eccl. 9:7)
  - f. Fellowship with others
  - g. Meditation
  - h. Prayer (including lament)
  - i. Immersing yourself in your ministries
  - j. Other: \_\_\_\_\_

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*Fun fact:* The word “lovingkindness” was coined around 1535 specifically to translate the Latin *miser cordia*, itself a translation of the Hebrew word *hesed* in the Psalms.

## Principles of Prayer

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<b>Prayer is the engine of change (i.e., don't expect things to change without prayer)</b>	James 4:2; Rom 12:12; 15:30
<b>Prayer is about you and God</b> , not about impressing others	Mt 6:5-6; but also 1 Cor 14:16
Verbally <b>recognize God as your "papa" or "daddy"</b>	Mt 6:9
Use prayer to <b>remind yourself of kingdom realities and eternal truths</b> : God is <i>the</i> Holy One; this world will pass away and only the eternal (i.e. souls) will remain, God is at work in the world, etc. <sup>1</sup>	Mt 6:10
<b>Ask God for what you need, in confidence, and share all your anxieties with him...</b>	Mt 6:12; 1 Peter 5:6-7; Phil 4:6-7; 1 Jn 5:14-15; and so many Pss
<b>...but not because he doesn't already know</b> , but because he's your papa...	Mt 6:32
<b>...who loves to give you good gifts</b>	Mt 7:7-11
<b>Reconcile with God</b> as you would with anyone else (and reconcile with them too)	Mt 6:12
Ask God to protect you from those things that cause you to sin and break relationships with him and others and pray intelligently against the enemy	Mt 6:13; Eph 6
<b>Pray for those things which God cares about</b> ("seek first the kingdom of God"), i.e., ask yourself what God cares about, <b>align your goals with his</b> , and then pray for those	Mt 6:33
Pray <b>boldly, shamelessly, persistently</b> (but not with mindless repetition; Mt 6:7), based not on who you (righteous? Hah!) are but <b>based on who he is</b> (merciful and loving) <sup>2</sup>	Lk 1:5-10; 18:1-9; 18:10-14
<b>Keep praying</b> even when God appears to have abandoned you	Pss 42-43; Job
<b>Let the Spirit guide your prayers</b> (even asking the Spirit to do so), and if you are so gifted don't neglect to pray in tongues	Rom 6:26-27; Eph 6:18

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<sup>1</sup> "If Jesus' confidence in petitionary prayer is well founded we are led to an astonishing ontological recognition: that God rules the world in constant consultation with those who pray, that God's determinations are wrought in dialogue with those who call for help." (Roman Goetz, *Christian Century*, Jan 29, 1997, p. 96)

<sup>2</sup> We often pray too small. Dorothy Jean Weaver writes about Lk 11:8-0, "Prayer is the gut-wrenching desperation that digs through the roof tiles or claws through the crowds to reach the healer on the other side (5:17-26; 8:40-48). It is the unimaginable trust to believe in a miracle sight unseen (7:1-20). It is the sheer audacity to throw all caution to the wind and break every rule on the books in a scandalous and highly public display of love and repentance (7:36-50). It is the utter impertinence to cry out loudly and persistently for healing (18:35-43) and justice (18:1-8) until those cries are heard. This is the prayer to which Jesus calls his disciples." (*Interpretation*, July 2002, p. 317)

## HESED BETWEEN GOD AND PEOPLE

*The Sinai covenant is repeatedly referred to as a "covenant of hesed" (Deut 7:9): "Know therefore that the Lord your God is God; he is the faithful God, keeping his covenant of **hesed** to a thousand generations of those who love him and keep his commandments." [Expressed in rescuing Israel from Egypt; see also Deut 7:12; 1 Ki 8:23; Ne 1:5; 9:32; Prov 31:26; Dn 9:4, etc.]*

*What the Lord requires (Mic 6:8): "what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love **hesed**, and to walk humbly with your God?" [Expressed in righteous living.]*

*Hosea calls Israel to repentance (Hos 10:12): "Sow for yourselves righteousness; reap **hesed**; break up your fallow ground; for it is time to seek the LORD, that he may come and rain righteousness upon you."*

*God promises betrothal to Israel (Hos 2:16-20): "On that day, says the LORD, you will call me, "My husband," and no longer will you call me, "My Baal." For I will remove the names of the Baals from her mouth, and they shall be mentioned by name no more. I will make for you a covenant on that day with the wild animals, the birds of the air, and the creeping things of the ground; and I will abolish the bow, the sword, and war from the land; and I will make you lie down in safety. And I will take you for my wife forever; I will take you for my wife in righteousness and in justice, in **hesed**, and in mercy. I will take you for my wife in faithfulness; and you shall know the LORD." [Expressed in God's commitment to loving provision.]*

*God's self-description (Ex 34:6-7): "The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in **hesed** and faithfulness, keeping **hesed** for the thousandth generation, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, yet by no means clearing the guilty" [Expressed notable in his forgiveness and justice. Also Mic 7:18, which says that God "delights in **hesed**".]*

*In the Messiah (Isa 55:3; Acts 13:34-35): "I will make an everlasting covenant with you, my **hesed** promised to David."; "God raised him from the dead so that he will never be subject to decay. As God has said, 'I will give you the holy and **hesed** promised to David.'" [Expressed in God's sending the Messiah and his resurrection.]*

### HESED IN THE PSALMS (SEE ALSO 85:10; 86:5)

*(Ps 23:6): "Surely goodness and **hesed** shall follow me all the days of my life." [Expressed in God's provision.]*

*(Ps 36:7-9): "How precious is your **hesed**, O God! All people may take refuge in the shadow of your wings. They feast on the abundance of your house, and you give them drink from the river of your delights. For with you is the fountain of life; in your light we see light."*

*(Ps 33:18): "Truly the eye of the LORD is on those who fear him, on those who hope in his **hesed**"*

*(Ps 63:1, 3): "A Psalm of David, when he was in the Wilderness of Judah. O God, you are my God, I seek you, my soul thirsts for you; my flesh faints for you, as in a dry and weary land where there is no water... Because your **hesed** is better than life, my lips will praise you."*

**Leader's Intro:**

**Extra questions and observations:**

1. ...
2. ...
3. ...
- 4.

## Notes

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### **I. Background**

a. ...

### **II. Words and Phrases**

a. ...

### **III. Themes**

a. ...

### **IV. Observations**

a. ...

### **V. Questions**

a. ...

### **VI. To do**

a. ...