

Session Four - Hard Knocks of Life 6th February**1. Reflect back**

- Have we stirred up and encouraged others this week, or been encouraged by others?
- If we committed to a spiritual practice last week, how has it been?
- What one thing did stand out from this week's talk?

2. Review the teaching

Suffering holds a unique place to make us more like Jesus. Pressing creates new wine in us. Generally we suffer less than in times past but we now struggle more with suffering. Previously, suffering was part of the purpose (Tim Keller) but secular post-modernism means individualism and personal happiness are the idols of today. Adele's recent single explains why her personal pursuit of happiness deconstructed her son's life, hoping he'd understand in later life.

Two key principles: We don't suffer alone and suffering has a place to make us more like Jesus.

Rom 5v3-5. Not stoicism (we don't rejoice despite suffering); nor masochism (give me more pain). Rejoicing IN Christ through suffering leads to wholeness. Endurance = patience, staying put. This leads to Character development.

1 Pet 1v6-7. Blacksmith metaphor. Heat in the furnace separates gold from the dross which comes to the top to be syphoned off leaving pure gold and the blacksmith can see his own image reflected back.

Suffering tests our faithfulness toward God. What is God doing in us when we suffer? He is our source of hope - he who knows us best, loves us most.

Suffering dethrones idols and re-enthrones Christ. Suffering accelerates our character. If all I'm left with is Jesus, that's OK. Hope is a muscle that is strengthened when trials come.

Fergal Roche's testimony:

Heather, his wife, died suddenly on 9 June 2021 of an intra-cerebral bleed. Fergal expected to be angry but "even in the horrid moments sensed God's peace despite his own hurt." He sensed the support of others like "a massive blanket." He felt "stripped of everything" but knew that God was with him, in his place. "Roche" means rock and Fergal knew that God was his rock.

Of hope, Fergal said God said "I'm living for you." Fergal is choosing not to cling to the past but recognises the great legacy Heather has left. He's persevering in a new chapter, being available to others. Life isn't neat and tidy. A "terrible act of violence has happened" but Fergal wants to be real. He encourages us to realise that God walks with us in our pain.

3. Realise the value

- Are we able to share lessons we've learned from our hard knocks?
- Are there times when we feel we've failed God during our suffering? What has helped us through these challenges?
- Is there someone struggling today? Can we pray for you? How can we help you? Remember - we don't suffer alone!

An Appendix from the Notes compiler:

The following is a short explanation of two words Adam Heather briefly touched on when referencing Rom 5v3-5.

Stoicism - a school of philosophy that hails from ancient Greece and Rome in the early parts of the 3rd century, BC. It was a philosophy of life that maximised positive emotions, reduced negative emotions and so purportedly helped individuals to hone their virtues of character. From which we get the word “stoical”. There is a sense of “grin and bear it.”

Our response: We’re not to rejoice **because** we are suffering. It isn’t a sign that we’ve been chosen to suffer and the more we suffer the better we are.

Masochism - the enjoyment of a self-inflicted activity that appears to be painful or tedious.

Our response: We are not to **increase** the suffering to become more like Christ. Historically, monks and others self-flagellated to “beat their flesh into submission”. More recently, some use self-harm often as a response to a lack of self worth.

Adam clearly said that when suffering comes we rejoice (NIV “glory”) in it **because** that helps us toward hope.

Rom 5v3-5 we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.

We are neither to look for suffering nor seek to avoid it. However, when we face it full on, God can use it to develop our character. We’re in this together and so need to support and encourage one another