

Dr. John Walton, Job, Session 28

Suffering and the Book of Job

Resources from NotebookLM

1) Abstract, 2) Audio podcast, 3) Study Guide, 4) Briefing Document, and 5) FAQs

1. Abstract of Walton, Job, Session 28, Suffering and the Book of Job, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

This is a transcript of John Walton's lecture on the Book of Job, specifically focusing on the theology of suffering. **Walton argues that the book doesn't offer solutions to suffering but helps us understand God amidst it.** He outlines five perspectives: suffering's universality, its contingency in an unfinished creation, its lack of inherent connection to sin, its potential to deepen faith, and its participation in Christ's suffering. **The lecture emphasizes that blaming God for suffering is inappropriate,** and instead suggests focusing on how to faithfully respond to hardship. Finally, the lecture prepares to summarize the overall message of the Book of Job in a future segment.

2. 14 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of Dr. Walton's, Job, Session 28 – Double click icon to play in Windows media player or go to the Biblicalelearning.org [BeL] Site and click the audio podcast link there (Old Testament → Psalms & Wisdom → Job → Walton).



**Walton_Job_Session
n28.mp3**

3. Briefing Document

Okay, here's a detailed briefing document summarizing the main themes and ideas from John Walton's "Session 28: Theology of Suffering and the Book of Job," focusing on the theological perspective on suffering presented in the lecture:

Briefing Document: Theology of Suffering in the Book of Job

Source: Excerpts from "Walton_Job_Session28.pdf" by John Walton

Introduction:

This document summarizes John Walton's lecture (Session 28) on the theology of suffering as presented in the Book of Job. Walton emphasizes that the book's primary purpose is not to provide easy answers to *why* suffering occurs, but rather to help us think appropriately about God *in light of* suffering. He outlines several levels and types of suffering, and then explores five key perspectives on suffering found in the Book of Job.

Key Points:

1. Levels and Types of Suffering (1:03-2:19):

Walton identifies a spectrum of suffering, acknowledging its multifaceted nature:

- **Physical:** Chronic pain, debilitating injuries.
- **Psychological:** Grief, shame, anxiety, broken relationships.
- **Circumstantial:** Living with conditions like eating disorders, HIV, or neurological diseases.
- **Surrogate:** Suffering due to the pain of others (e.g., caring for the aged/terminally ill).
- **Systemic:** Suffering resulting from oppressive regimes, human trafficking, hunger, and disease.

Walton states, "Suffering can break us, and it's characteristic of the broken world in which we live."

2. Questions Suffering Raises (2:19-4:32):

Suffering inevitably leads to questions about God's role and nature. Common questions include:

- Why did God create a world where suffering exists?
- Why does God allow suffering to continue?
- Why is suffering happening to me?
- Is God teaching me something?
- Did I do something wrong?

Walton notes that skeptics might interpret suffering as evidence of an inadequate God, leading some to question God's existence or worthiness of worship. He warns against assuming God must meet our expectations and against trying to "vindicate" God as if we can judge Him. The goal is not to find a reason for God to "account" for himself but to learn how to think about God appropriately amid suffering.

3. Five Perspectives on Suffering (4:32-15:01):

Walton presents five perspectives on suffering drawn from the Book of Job:

- **Suffering is Universal (4:32-5:07):** Suffering is "the lot of all humanity." It is not something that singles out specific people. Walton says, "If you're not suffering now, the odds are that you will be eventually." It's a common, shared human experience.
- **Suffering is a Contingency of Creation in Process (5:07-7:54):** We are living in a world not yet fully ordered; therefore, suffering is an "expected contingency." The nervous system and emotions, while essential, make us vulnerable to pain. "Normal cannot be defined as a life free of suffering." Walton suggests reframing expectations and accepting suffering as a reality of this current world.
- "We have to build this into our expectations. Normal cannot be defined as a life free of suffering. That's not normal."
- **Suffering is NOT Intrinsically Connected to Sin (7:54-11:26):** While some suffering is the direct consequence of sin, most suffering is *not* directly caused by personal wrongdoing. "Suffering can, at times, be the result of disorder... but it can also be experienced as a result of non-order incomplete creation." God can use suffering as punishment but we are not qualified to identify whether that is the case.

Walton emphasizes that we should evaluate our lives when suffering occurs, but not assume a direct cause-and-effect. "Trusting in God's wisdom is the strongest counsel the Bible has to offer. It must suffice." Walton pushes back against using terms like "allow" or "permit" in a way that blames God, noting such language inadequately reflects God's involvement. He quotes John Polkinghorne: "the suffering and evil of the world are not due to weakness, oversight or callousness on God's part, but rather they are the inescapable cost of a creation allowed to be other than God."

- **Suffering as an Opportunity to Deepen Faith (11:26-14:18):** Suffering can contribute to personal growth and faith development. Walton says, "Whatever amount of suffering any of us have experienced in our lives, that suffering has contributed to making us who we are, for good or ill." He emphasizes that God might not remove suffering, but may strengthen us through it. We should not become disappointed in God if suffering persists. "If it seems to us that he has not met our expectations, the problem is not in him. We should re-examine our expectations." We are called to trust and honor God during suffering.
- "Perhaps it's more important for us to pray that God would strengthen us to endure the suffering and to be faithful to him throughout the time of trial or crisis rather than to take it away."
- **Participating in Christ's Suffering (14:18-15:01):** When we suffer, we participate in Christ's suffering and his triumph over defeat. "We can try to withstand our suffering as we imagine that we are participating in Christ's suffering." This provides a framework for endurance and finding meaning in suffering.

4. Conclusion (15:01-15:49):

Walton concludes that suffering is a reality of the broken world and not something that can be eliminated from our lives. We should not blame God but instead focus on how our suffering can serve his purposes. He encourages us to look for ways our suffering can testify to God in our lives.

Key Takeaways:

- The Book of Job focuses on how we think about God during suffering, not on giving reasons for its existence.
- Suffering is a multifaceted experience, occurring on many levels.
- Suffering is not necessarily a punishment for sin; it's a contingency of living in an incomplete creation.
- Suffering can deepen faith and allow us to participate in Christ's suffering.
- Our focus should be on honoring God and trusting him amidst suffering, rather than demanding answers.

Implications:

Walton's lecture challenges simplistic views of suffering, pushing us to reframe our expectations and understand suffering as a complex part of the human experience. The most important implications are to avoid blaming God, to seek faith and endurance, and to understand that suffering isn't a sign of divine disfavor. This framework encourages a more robust and nuanced understanding of God in a world marked by suffering.

4. Job Study Guide: Session 28, Suffering and the Book of Job

Theology of Suffering in the Book of Job: A Study Guide

Quiz

Instructions: Answer each question in 2-3 sentences based on the provided material.

1. According to Walton, what is the primary goal of the Book of Job regarding suffering?
2. List three distinct types or levels of suffering that are mentioned in the source material.
3. What fundamental questions about God's nature are raised by the existence of suffering?
4. What does the source material say about the universality of suffering for humanity?
5. How does Walton explain the connection between suffering and the "creation in process?"
6. Is suffering always a direct result of sin, according to the text? Explain your answer.
7. How might suffering provide an opportunity for believers, as suggested by the text?
8. According to the source, what is a more important prayer request during suffering, compared to asking God to remove it?
9. How does the concept of participating in Christ's suffering impact how believers should approach their own suffering?
10. According to the source, should believers expect to be free from suffering in this world? Explain your answer.

Answer Key

1. The primary goal of the Book of Job is not to provide answers for suffering or models for how to respond to it. Instead, it aims to help readers think about God appropriately when they are suffering.

2. Three distinct types of suffering mentioned are physical suffering (chronic pain), psychological suffering (grief, shame), and circumstantial suffering (living with a disease like HIV).
3. The existence of suffering raises questions about how a God who is all-good, all-powerful, just, and compassionate can allow or even create a world with such pervasive suffering.
4. The source material states that suffering is the lot of all humanity; it is a universal experience that everyone will likely encounter at some point in their life.
5. Walton explains that suffering is a contingency of the creation in process because we do not yet live in a world of full order, and disorder is responsible for suffering. This means the full order of creation has not yet been achieved and thus suffering is expected.
6. The text asserts that suffering is not always a direct result of sin; while some suffering may be a consequence of sin, some is also due to the incomplete nature of creation. We cannot establish a direct link between sin and personal suffering.
7. Suffering, according to the text, can provide an opportunity to deepen one's faith. It can contribute to shaping who we become and to help us trust God more fully.
8. The source suggests that during suffering, it may be more important to pray for the strength to endure the suffering and remain faithful to God than to pray for the suffering to be removed.
9. The concept of participating in Christ's suffering encourages believers to withstand their suffering by seeing it as a participation in the way Christ experienced suffering.
10. The source concludes that believers should not expect to be free from suffering, as it is the condition of the world and the human plight. Instead, believers should seek what purposes can be served through suffering and testify to God in their lives.

Essay Questions

Instructions: Write a well-structured essay addressing one of the following questions, drawing upon the provided source material.

1. Discuss the different levels and types of suffering described by Walton, and how recognizing this diversity might influence one's understanding of suffering and its impact on individuals and communities.
2. Analyze Walton's perspective on the relationship between suffering and sin, explaining why it is inappropriate to assume a direct correlation between the two. What implications does this have for pastoral care?
3. Evaluate the idea that suffering can be an opportunity for deepening faith, referencing specific points made by Walton, and suggest ways in which believers can effectively utilize suffering for spiritual growth.
4. Explore the meaning of "creation in process" and how that explains the existence of suffering, according to Walton. How does this concept affect our expectations about life?
5. Compare and contrast how the source material suggests believers respond to suffering versus how skeptics view God given the prevalence of suffering in the world.

Glossary of Key Terms

- **Theology of Suffering:** The study of how religious beliefs, particularly those related to God, relate to the experience of suffering.
- **Physical Suffering:** Pain or discomfort experienced in the body, often due to injury or illness.
- **Psychological Suffering:** Mental or emotional distress, such as grief, shame, anxiety, or broken relationships.
- **Circumstantial Suffering:** Suffering arising from difficult life circumstances, such as disease or poverty.
- **Surrogate Suffering:** Suffering experienced as a result of caring for those who are suffering.
- **Systemic Suffering:** Suffering arising from larger social issues such as oppression, human trafficking, hunger, and disease.
- **Creation in Process:** The concept that the world is not yet in a state of full order as God is still working on creation. This also implies that suffering is an inevitable contingency within a world in progress.
- **Non-order/Disorder:** The state of something being incomplete or out of place. These states can lead to suffering according to the source.
- **Contingency:** An event that may occur, particularly in relationship to the incomplete or broken nature of the current world. Suffering is portrayed as a contingency within this framework.
- **Prophetic Voices:** Those in scripture who are able to identify what is an act of punishment by God and what isn't.
- **Intrinsically Connected:** A connection that is inherent and essential. Suffering is not intrinsically connected to sin but can be a consequence of sin.

5. FAQs on Walton, Job, Session 28, Suffering and the Book of Job, Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)

FAQ on the Theology of Suffering Based on John Walton's Analysis of the Book of Job

1. **What is the primary purpose of the Book of Job regarding suffering?** The Book of Job is not intended to provide answers about why suffering occurs or to offer a model for how one should respond to it. Instead, it aims to help us think about God appropriately during times of suffering. It seeks to address how we understand God in relation to the reality of suffering.
2. **What are the different types or levels of suffering that exist?** Suffering manifests in various forms, including physical suffering (e.g., chronic pain, injury), psychological suffering (e.g., grief, anxiety, broken relationships), circumstantial suffering (e.g., living with a disease), and surrogate suffering (caring for those who suffer). There is also systemic suffering relating to things like oppression, human trafficking, and disease on a societal level.
3. **What questions does suffering raise about God, and how should we approach them?** Suffering prompts questions such as why a good and powerful God would create or allow a world with so much suffering. It can also lead to questioning whether our suffering is a form of punishment or a test from God. We should avoid trying to put God on trial or demanding he conform to our expectations. Instead we should focus on understanding who God is in the context of our suffering. We can use suffering as an opportunity to evaluate our lives and consider our path.
4. **Is suffering unique to certain individuals, or is it a universal human experience?** Suffering is a universal aspect of the human experience. It is not a selective occurrence targeting certain individuals but is rather something that all people will experience to varying degrees throughout their lives. It's part of the collective human condition.
5. **How does the concept of creation in process explain the existence of suffering?** We currently live in a creation that is still in the process of becoming fully ordered. Suffering is a contingency of this process, arising from both disorder and incomplete order. God designed us with a nervous system to warn us of potential harm, and with emotions that allow us to love but also feel pain. Since these are key components of what it means to be human, some suffering is inevitable.

6. **Is suffering always a direct consequence of sin or divine punishment?** While some suffering is undeniably the direct result of sin, not all suffering should be viewed as divine punishment. God might use suffering to punish sin, but that does not mean any specific instance of suffering should be assumed to be a direct consequence of personal sin. We are not in a place to interpret divine intention this way. Moreover, suffering can also result from the disorder inherent in the world that we live in.
7. **How can suffering be an opportunity for growth, and what should our attitude be toward it?** Suffering can offer opportunities to deepen our faith. Our suffering, whether positive or negative, contributes to who we become. While we can pray for healing, we should not demand it from God. It's important to pray for strength to endure suffering and remain faithful to God. Our attitude to suffering should not involve disappointment in God but rather should focus on trusting him and re-examining our own expectations.
8. **How does the concept of participating in Christ's suffering relate to our own experiences of suffering?** When we suffer, we can see it as an opportunity to participate in the suffering of Christ. Christ's life and death demonstrate triumph through defeat. Instead of expecting deliverance from suffering, we can try to endure it by recognizing this connection and trying to respond faithfully.