

**FINDING PURPOSE IN PAIN**  
**PLENARY 1: RECOGNIZING WHAT PSYCHOLOGICAL AND SPIRITUAL CRISIS CAN TEACH US ABOUT MENTAL AND SPIRITUAL HEALTH**

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**INTRODUCTION**

- Basic Assumptions – suffering, pain and loss
- The Big Picture
  - A Biblical Context for our Suffering
  - A Psychological Context for our Suffering

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**ROMANS 8:19-23 (TLB)**

<sup>19</sup>For all creation is waiting patiently and hopefully for that future day when God will resurrect his children.

<sup>20-21</sup>For on that day thorns and thistles, sin, death, and decay—the things that overcame the world against its will at God's command—will all disappear, and the world around us will share in the glorious freedom from sin which God's children enjoy.

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### ROMANS 8:19-23 (TLB)

<sup>22</sup>For we know that even the things of nature, like animals and plants, suffer in sickness and death as they await this great event. <sup>23</sup>And even we Christians, although we have the Holy Spirit within us as a foretaste of future glory, also groan to be released from pain and suffering. We, too, wait anxiously for that day when God will give us our full rights as his children, including the new bodies he has promised us—bodies that will never be sick again and will never die.



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### THE BIBLICAL CONTEXT FOR OUR SUFFERING

1. We currently live among the “thorns, thistles, sin, death and decay.”



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### THE BIBLICAL CONTEXT FOR OUR SUFFERING

2. We have a foretaste of the future glory – we know what things are supposed to be like – though damaged, we can still see the beauty of God’s creation



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## THE BIBLICAL CONTEXT FOR OUR SUFFERING

3. We also groan to be released from the pain and suffering (as if in childbirth)



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## THE BIBLICAL CONTEXT FOR OUR SUFFERING

4. The overarching truth of this passage – we live in a broken creation, pain is inevitable, but we have a foretaste for how things are “supposed to be”

- Acceptance of this truth allows us to live into our current reality more fully
- I would recommend Cornelius Plantinga's book *Not the Ways It's Supposed to Be: A Breviary of Sin* for further reading on this topic



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## THE BIBLICAL CONTEXT FOR OUR SUFFERING

5. There will come a day, however, when we will be released from this earthly suffering when “God will give us our full rights as his children, including the new bodies he has promised us” (the “not yet”)



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## THE PSYCHOLOGICAL CONTEXT FOR OUR SUFFERING

1. *Most* pain and suffering are the byproducts of substantial loss experiences

- From cradle to grave (e.g., birth, siblings, relationships, school, college, marriage, loss of loved ones, power, dreams, hopes, wishes, position, money, etc.)
- I would recommend Judith Viorst's book entitled *Necessary Losses* for those who would like to do more reading on this topic




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## THE PSYCHOLOGICAL CONTEXT FOR OUR SUFFERING

2. Virtually all growth, both psychological and spiritual, begins with a deep acceptance of the reality and inevitability of loss

We grow by losing, leaving, and letting go...




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## THE PSYCHOLOGICAL CONTEXT FOR OUR SUFFERING: DEVELOPMENTAL EVOLUTION OF OUR REACTION TO PAIN AND LOSS

Early-Stage – deny pain and pursue fantasy

- Cost – shallowness and immaturity
- Vulnerability – “stuckness”




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**THE PSYCHOLOGICAL CONTEXT FOR OUR SUFFERING:  
DEVELOPMENTAL EVOLUTION OF OUR REACTION TO  
PAIN AND LOSS**

Middle-Stage – Avoid pain and seek pleasure

- Cost – illegitimate suffering – the alternative to legitimate suffering
- Vulnerability – relational failures




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**THE PSYCHOLOGICAL CONTEXT FOR OUR SUFFERING:  
DEVELOPMENTAL EVOLUTION OF OUR REACTION TO  
PAIN AND LOSS**

Late-Stage – Pain as a path to growth and truth

- Cost – loss of escapism and naivete
- Vulnerability – pride




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**THE PSYCHOLOGICAL CONTEXT FOR OUR  
SUFFERING**

- In Plenary Address #2 we'll discuss the ways in which we can find meaning, purpose and health despite, and through, our pain




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