



The Seat of Suffering | James Powell | 08.20.2023

Weekly Study

## SHARE

It's an honor to welcome our newest Teaching Pastor, James Powell, to speak during week three of our *Pendulum* series. During his message, *The Seat of Suffering*, James discusses the tension we often feel regarding what we believe God thinks about us at any given time. Christian author, A.W. Tozer recognized the value of this tension saying, "What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us." But James pointed out that Tozer likely wasn't referring to "what we believe about God," but rather, "what do we think God believes about us?" American sociologist, Charles Cooley, summarized human thought of the self this way, "I am not what I think I am, I am not what you think I am, I am what I think you think I am." Simply put, we tell ourselves stories about what we believe other people think of us and let our conclusions dictate our identity, while completely disregarding what people actually think about us and what we know to be true about ourselves. This can also be true when it comes to what we believe God thinks about us which has a profound impact on our ability to live out our faith on a daily basis depending on what we tell ourselves. The tension here is not in trying to get better at guessing what we think God believes about us, but to get better at receiving the grace and truth that God has already proclaimed over our lives as we walk through different seasons of life.

**What gets you excited about life?**

**What have you learned recently that has changed your mindset about something?**

**Give an example of a time when what you thought someone thought about you affected your life, but you ended up being wrong about what they thought about you.**

## GROW

**Read Romans 5:2-5, Romans 8:28 NIV**

As little kids, we learn that there are rewards and consequences to every action we take based on the laws of society and nature. If we steal something or put our hand on a hot stove there are painful consequences to our actions, and if we study hard for a test or eat healthy, we are often rewarded. But these principles don't always apply to our journey of faith. Good things don't always follow good deeds, and sometimes bad things happen for what seems like no reason, however, because we live in a world of "cause and effect" it's easy to question why (or even take the blame for) bad things that happen in our life. We can say things like, "God why did you do this to me?" Or "This must be happening because of something wrong I did in the past," or anything in between. On one side of the pendulum, we have the fact that we live in a broken world where bad things happen because of the fall of Adam and Eve, and on the other side of the pendulum we have God's promise to make all things perfect and new. The former leads us into spiraling hopelessness, and the latter, while promised, is yet to be fulfilled. But the tension between the two is where the hope of Romans 5:2-5 and the assurance of Romans 8:28 is found. Do you trust that even though the season of suffering you're going through isn't from God, he will use it for good? Will you invite God into your season of suffering so he can reveal his character, develop yours, and build up perseverance and hope within you that will carry you through seasons of suffering and closer to his glory?

**What do you think Paul meant when he said, "we glory in our sufferings?"**

**What would it look like for you to "glory" in your suffering right now?**

**What fuels or builds up your "perseverance" during seasons of suffering?**

M O V E

**Read James 1:2-4 NIV**

**How has your faith been tested (or pushed to the limit) in seasons of suffering?**

**In what way might God be trying to make you "mature and complete, lacking in nothing" as he uses your current season to finish a work within you?**

**On a scale of 1-5, how would you rank your perseverance in your current season? 1=completely hopeless and don't see a way out, 5= have overflowing hope and committed to enduring against all odds. Why?**

**How can people support you, strengthen you, encourage you, and link arms with you as you persevere through the season you're going through?**

P R A Y

God, we thank you for surrounding us with a community of people to link arms with as we celebrate seasons of fruitfulness and persevere through seasons of suffering. Please remind us that we are never alone, and we can rejoice in the fact that you have gone before us and claimed victory over our greatest trials and deepest sorrows. We may not understand why things are happening in our lives right now so we pray that you help us with our unbelief, whatever it may be, and help us rest in your peace, trust in your plan, and find hope in your faithfulness. We pray that we can find comfort and joy in the fact that you work all things together for your good, and no season is wasted because you are always refining us into the people you always intended us to be. So, we give you this week to do in our lives whatever you want to do.