

## **A BIBLICAL THEOLOGY OF SUFFERING, DISABILITY, AND THE CHURCH OL SYLLABUS**

### **I. COURSE DESCRIPTION**

A study of the biblical meanings and purposes of suffering with theological reflections and application to various aspects of suffering and disability-related ministries. 3 hours.

### **II. COURSE OBJECTIVES**

#### **A. Cognitive**

The student will...

1. Recognize a variety of contexts in which effective biblical instruction on “suffering” can/should occur in personal life and ministry.
2. Synthesize biblical and theological elements regarding suffering into a written logical and biblically accurate position paper.

#### **B. Affective**

The student will...

1. Develop a clarified sense of God’s calling to compassionately minister to those who “suffer” within the broad scope of Christian evangelism, church outreach, and church inreach.
2. Deepen appreciation for the privilege and responsibility associated with teaching the Word of God and how it relates to suffering.
3. Identify with individuals who suffer with disablement in terms of the physical and perceptual struggles that they face on a regular basis.

#### **C. Behavioral**

The student will...

1. Understand the importance of “suffering” ministries in the church and be able to devise methods to create them.

2. Be equipped to provide leadership in ministry opportunities that involve "suffering" through instructional design and accurate biblical teaching.

### **III. COURSE TEXTBOOKS**

#### **A. Required**

Alcorn, Randy. *If God Is Good: Faith in the Midst of Suffering and Evil*. Colorado Springs, CO: Multnomah Books, 2009.

Tada, Joni E. and Steven Estes. *When God Weeps: Why Our Sufferings Matter to the Almighty*. Zondervan: Grand Rapids, 1997.

Waters, Larry J. and Roy B. Zuck. *Why, O God? Suffering and Disability in the Bible and Church*. Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2011

#### **B. Suggested**

Carter, Erik. *Including People with Disabilities in Faith Communities*. Brookes Pub. Co: 2007.

Fretheim, Terence E. *The Suffering of God: An Old Testament Perspective*. Fortress Press: 1998.

Hubach, Stephanie. *Same Lake, Different Boat: Coming Alongside People Touched by Disability*. P and R Publishing: Phillipsburg, 2006.

Lewis, C.S. *A Grief Observed*. Harperone Pub: 2001.

Leyshon, David. *Sickness, Suffering, and Scripture*. Banner of Truth: 2008.

Nouwen, Henri. *Adam: God's Beloved*. Orbis Books: 1997.

\_\_\_\_\_. *In the Name of Jesus*. Crossroad: 1993.

Pierson, Jim. *Exceptional Teaching: A Comprehensive Guide for Including Students with Disabilities*. Standard Pub. Co: 2002.

Piper, John and Justin Taylor. *Suffering and the Sovereignty of God*. Crossway: Wheaton, 2006.

Plantinga, Alvin. *God, Freedom, and Evil*. Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company: 1977.

Rhodes, Ron. *Why Do Bad Things Happen If God is Good?* Harvest House: Eugene, 2004.

Solomon, Lon. *Brokenness: How God Redeems Pain and Suffering.* Red Door Press: 2005.

Tada, Joni E. and Steve Jensen. *Barrier-Free Friendships: Bridging the Distance Between You and Families with Disabilities.* Zondervan: Grand Rapids, 1997.

Tada, Joni E. and Nigel Cameron. *How to Be a Christian in a Brave New World.* Zondervan: Grand Rapids, 2006.

Tada, Joni E. and Steve Miller. *Through the Roof: A Manual to Assist Churches in Developing an Effective Disability Ministry and Outreach.* Joni and Friends Ministries: Agoura Hills, 2006.

Wolterstorff, Nicholas. *Lament for a Son.* Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company: 1987.

Yancey, Philip. *Disappointment with God.* Zondervan: Grand Rapids, 1988.

#### **IV. COURSE REQUIREMENTS**

##### **A. Reading Assignments**

Students will complete the reading of all “required texts” and handouts by the end of the semester and report the percentage of reading completed on the “Reading and Video Report” by the end of the final unit.

##### **B. Learning Activities**

###### 1. “A Day in the Life” Assignment and Paper.

Students will be required to rent or borrow a manual wheelchair. The student will choose one full day and utilize the wheelchair during his or her “normal” day routine. Most students in the past have attempted to mimic life with bilateral leg paralysis. This exercise is expected to include mobility and activities within one’s house and community. The two primary allowed exceptions to being wheelchair bound for this assignment are for (1) bathroom privileges and (2) in case a situation presents itself (in the opinion of the student) where harm or injury could occur if one proceeded with a particular activity. However, with the above exceptions, it is good to contemplate about the issues that would come up if one was completely wheelchair dependent. As part of this assignment, a visitation to at least *two public establishments* is

required. It is recommended that the student go to places that he or she does not normally visit or is known – this can include restaurants, libraries, a church (try to not go to your home church if Sunday is chosen for obvious reasons), or some other public institution. It is recommended when possible that a friend go to the above places with you in order to provide transportation and also to provide feedback on the experiences. This is not to be an exercise of “deception,” but a chance to sense and feel what it is like to “live” for a day in a wheelchair. Take mental notes of how you are perceived and looked upon in the above establishments. If asked about your “disability,” be honest and inform the one who asks regarding the assignment and its ultimate purpose.

A few additional points to consider. It is recommended that one purchase or borrow some “weightlifting” gloves while doing this exercise (you will soon learn how hard on the hands it is to push a wheelchair all day). Also, for those more germ conscious, bring a small bottle of hand sanitizer with you. For safety, please be aware of inclines and declines while in a wheelchair – you will be surprised how easy it is to lose control if you have not used a wheelchair before. One final note – no wheelies or wheelchair races! We do not want to have any DTS students with a resultant head injury or skin tear as a result of this exercise.

Upon completion of the “Day in the Life,” write a six to eight page paper (not including title page) regarding the whole experience from start to finish including a section on lessons learned. Turabian formatting is expected to be followed. Have a good day in the life! You’ve been granted an opportunity to wheel in someone else’s wheelchair for a day!

## 2. Agape Project Reflection Paper.

Please review the Agape Project Guide at the end of this syllabus for further clarification on DTS Agape Project expectations.

The student will schedule and perform at least two of the following:

- (A) Visit, observe, and interact with a church Disability Ministry.
- (B) Evaluate and assess the interest and need for a Disability Ministry in your home church if one does not exist. This involves using contact hours in interviewing and potentially building the relationships that would be involved in such a ministry, people with disabilities are expected to be included in interviews.
- (C) Interview an individual who works in a Disability Ministry field.
- (D) Interview and befriend an individual with a disability or family who has a

member with a disablement. Seek to gracefully listen and learn from their perspective regarding life with disability (not counsel, not judge, and not instruct).

(E) Visit, observe, and interact with a “grief” or disability-related support group. Both Christian and secular groups (such as a “Parkinson’s Group”, a “Cancer Support Group”, hospice care, or a hospital chaplain) can be visited.

(F) Shadow a Home Health RN, Physical Therapist, or Occupational Therapist for up to 3 hours.

(G) Attend and interact with attendees at a local Gospel Mission or homeless center.

(H) Other ideas that the student may have can be approved by the professor.

Minimum **15** total *contact hours* are required (please convey in the paper how these hours were spent). Write an eight to nine page reflection paper regarding the type of ministry or group observed, the experiences themselves, and lessons learned. At least three written sources are to be referenced that correspond to the ministries observed. For example, if a Parkinson’s support group is visited, the student will interact with references related to Parkinson’s disease and/or references related to support groups themselves. If a Disability Ministry is visited, be sure to include perceptions regarding strengths and weaknesses, as well as, thoughts/ideas for improvement and growth.

### 3. Theology of Suffering Position Paper.

The student will compose a *fifteen to twenty page* paper that defines and summarizes his or her position on God and what he or she considers to be a Biblical theology of suffering. Interaction with the biblical text, theological reflections, and evident contemplation with class lectures and “required texts” are expected to be conveyed in the paper. At least eight references must be used. Reference can be made to class notes from lectures in the paper itself; however, “class notes” can not be used as counting towards the eight reference requirement. Required texts can be counted. The fifteen to twenty page requirement does not include title page, bibliography, or footnotes – this paper will need to be at least fifteen pages of solid content. Part of the challenge of this paper is to determine and filter out what key components need to be present in order to make a clear Biblical position on a theology of suffering. Be thinking about these aspects that need to be in the paper as the course progresses and as you read.

A couple other tips in order to help prevent the repeat of prior student mistakes: (1) Do not put this final paper off till the end – work on it as the

semester progresses. Writing a concise and clear theology of suffering paper takes a lot of thought and time to process through all of the issues. Prayerfully and thoughtfully work through the paper as the lectures progress -- you will be rewarded if you do and have an end product that will help your future ministry if/when suffering is involved; (2) As this is a position paper, it is expected that your clear worded position will be clearly stated in the introduction and then adequately/logically defended as the paper progresses. A few opposing popular views should also be argued for/against with supporting evidence.

### **C. Interactions**

Some of the units will have class interaction. In some cases you may post a response to an interaction question and discuss these in your online groups. In other cases you may respond to papers posted by you and your classmates. This will require that you open and read papers written by your classmates and discuss their work. Interaction is a vital part of the online experience. It is here that you will meet your classmates, discuss the class material, and develop a sense of community.

### **D. Quizzes and/or Exams**

There are no quizzes or exams for this course.

## **V. COURSE POLICIES**

### **A. Weight Given to Course Requirements for Grading**

1. Completed reading and videos as per schedule - 15%.
2. "A Day in the Life" assignment and paper - 15%.
3. Agape Project Reflection Paper.- 20%.
4. Theology of Suffering and Disability Position Paper - 35%.
5. Interactions - 15%

### **B. Late Assignments**

No assignments will be accepted after the date designated on the syllabus without PRIOR notification.

### **C. Videos**

All videos must be viewed. In addition to checking each unit as complete, each student will report their successful completion of viewing in the "Reading and Video Report" in the final unit. There will be grading penalties if they are not viewed.

#### D. Letter/Numerical Grade Scale

<b>A+ 99-100</b>	<b>B+ 91-93</b>	<b>C+ 83-85</b>	<b>D+ 75-77</b>	<b>F 0-69</b>
<b>A 96-98</b>	<b>B 88-90</b>	<b>C 80-82</b>	<b>D 72-74</b>	
<b>A- 94-95</b>	<b>B- 86-87</b>	<b>C- 78-79</b>	<b>D- 70-71</b>	

#### VI. COURSE SUPPLEMENTAL INFORMATION

Please identify your work properly using a title page. Follow Turabian format where possible, using 12 pt. Times New Roman font, 1 inch margins, double spacing, page numbers, etc.

DTS does not discriminate on the basis of disability in the operation of any of its programs and activities. To avoid discrimination the student is responsible for informing the Coordinator of Services for Students with Disabilities and the course instructor of any disabling condition that will require modifications.

#### VII. COURSE LECTURES AND ASSIGNMENT SCHEDULE

##### *Part 1 - The Need for Disability Ministry*

**Unit 1** - Course Introduction: Statistics, and Disability Ministry models (Daniel Thomson, PT, Th.M.)

**Unit 2** - Church Based Disability Ministry and Disability Outreach/Inreach (Jessica Baldrige, M.Ed. and Mike Justice, Th.M.)

##### *Part 2 - The Biblical Foundation of Suffering*

**Unit 3** - Suffering in the Pentateuch and the Prophets (Dr. Stephen Bramer)

**Unit 4** - Suffering in the Psalms and Wisdom Literature (Dr. Ron Allen), and Suffering in Job (Dr. Larry Waters)

**Unit 5** - Suffering in the Gospels (Dr. Mark Bailey)

**Unit 6** - Suffering in the Pauline Epistles (Dr. Stan Toussaint)

**Unit 7** - Suffering in non-Pauline Epistles (Dr. Jim Allman) and Suffering in Revelation (Dr. Tom Constable) *“A Day in the Life” Paper Due*

##### *Part 3 - The Theology of Suffering and Disability*

**Unit 8** - Theology of Suffering and Disability (Dr. D. Blount)

**Unit 9** - Theology of Suffering and Disability (Dr. D. Blount) /Suffering and The Global View (Dr. Jim Neathery) *Disability Ministry Assessment Due*

***Part 4 - The Ministry of Suffering and Disability***

**Unit 10** - Pastoral Care and Counseling Regarding Disability  
Pastoral Care Regarding Disability (Dr. Vic Anderson)  
Counseling and Family Dynamics (Steve Fischer, MA/BC)  
Counseling and Support Groups (Dr. C. Gary Barnes)  
“Death and Dying” (Dr. Linda Marten)

**Unit 11** - Common Disablements: Pediatric and Adult

**Unit 12** - Bioethics (Dr. Richard Voet) *Position Paper Due*

**Unit 13** - Joni and Friends (Joni E. Tada)/Question and Answer Panel *Reading & Video Report*

## **Agape Project Guide**

### **Introduction**

- This is a brief guide to help you incorporate an Agape Project assignment.
- An Agape Project will help students connect classroom content with personal, spiritual formation in three ways. First, students will build relationships with persons in need, giving students the opportunity to practice concepts taught in the classroom. Second, this practice “in” relationship will help students perceive where God is already active in people’s lives and perceive where the students’ own presumptions and misconceptions may lie. In addition to students’ spiritual formation, Agape Projects help DTS become known in our community by our love.

Agape Projects provide opportunities for a deeper level of learning where the class content that has shaped how students think is given the opportunity to be practiced and further shape how students live.

### **Requirements**

- The student’s time is spent in direct contact with the people being served by the ministry.
- For the purposes of this assignment service must be relational, **face-to-face**.

- The ministry should emphasize **compassionate care** for people whose needs are apparent, or even profound.
- A compassion ministry may consist of serving any of the following people groups: *single parents, orphans, immigrants, disabled, senior adults, hospital patients, extended care residents, mentally challenged individuals, homeless, marginalized people groups.*
- The student will spend approximately **15 hours** at this site over the course of the semester.
- These hours are to be spread out (**1-2 hours per week**), not together in large blocks of time.
- Spreading out the hours allows more consistent **relationship building**.
- The student will write a **reflection paper**. Reflection is a significant part of the learning process and should help students integrate the service experience with classroom content.