

THREE-FOLD SALVATION FROM SUFFERING AND TRAUMA

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Abstract

Three-phase salvation can be understood in relation to the relief of the subjective experience of suffering and trauma. Justification, the first phase, relieves the suffering of guilt and shame (through forgiveness and a new identity in Christ). Sanctification, the second phase, relieves the suffering of moral evil (suffering that our choices cause the self and those within our direct circle of influence). Glorification, the third phase, relieves the suffering of natural evil (the suffering caused by things beyond our control). I believe the three phases of salvation, understood in relation to suffering, better prepare our healthcare students at Kettering College for their future careers in healthcare. This presentation/paper will seek to theologically articulate three-phase salvation from suffering and investigate curricular integration and assessment of this premise through the suffering narrative papers our students write in our RELB 101 class.

Introduction

There are several concerns to be taken into account when approaching the relation of salvation to suffering. First, in Christianity, there has been a history of seeing suffering as a positive necessity that brings about salvation and/or perfection.¹ Second, theological systems of

¹ "The person who has endured trials, who has shown heroism, is the one to be highly valued (just as gold which emerges from the furnace is greatly treasured). Trials and suffering have a positive value: they lead to steadfast endurance." Patrick J. Hartin, "Call to Be Perfect through Suffering (James 1,2-4): The Concept of Perfection in the Epistle of James and the Sermon on the Mount," *Biblica* 77, no. 4 (1996): 479. This is also Clifford Barbarick's conclusion at the end of his study of 1 Peter. Clifford A. Barbarick, "You Shall Be Holy, for I Am

salvation that focus on the objective accomplishments of salvation are often focused on forensic righteousness rather than the subjective human condition of suffering. Third, theological systems that focus on the subjective accomplishments of salvation often end up lessening the divinity of Christ and/or the power of God in order to present a more empathetic divine character.

Christianity's False Assumption: Suffering is Positive

In describing this first concern regarding the relationship between suffering and salvation, it is important to take a humble stance and recognize the horrendous experiences which some Christians have had to survive. It might be rather easy to become indignant as Jesus did, when the Religious Leaders wanted to deny healing to a man on the Sabbath.² Nonetheless, the idea that suffering in Christian circles is positive, bringing about sanctification and perfection, is long-standing in tradition.³

Holy': Theosis in 1 Peter," *Journal of Theological Interpretation* 9, no. 2 (2015): 296.

² Mark 1:41; Luke 13:15-16.

³ This can be seen in the attitudes towards the suffering of the martyrs in the writings of the early church fathers. Those who were martyred were even said to have been given special gifts including bold speech both to the crowds at the time of their execution and later in heaven as advocates before the throne of God. Martyrdom also acquired a special sacrament of grace and would insure the martyrs eternal salvation. Nonna Verna Harrison and David G. Hunter, eds., *Suffering and Evil in Early Christian Thought* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2016), 30-31. John Stott also emphasizes the obsession with joy found in martyrdom by sharing the sufferings of Christ. "In the post-apostolic period, there was even a longing to be united with Christ in martyrdom. Ignatius, Bishop of Antioch in Syria at the beginning of the second century, on his way to Rome, begged the church there not to attempt to secure his release lest they should deprive him of this honour! 'Let fire and the cross,' he wrote, 'let the companies of wild beasts, let breaking of bones and tearing of limbs, let the grinding of the whole body, and all the malice of the devil, come upon me; be it so, if only I may gain Christ Jesus!' A few years later, in the middle of the second century, Polycarp the eighty-six-year-old Bishop of Smyrna, having refused to escape death either by fleeing or by denying Christ, was burnt at the stake. Just before the fire was lit, he prayed, Oh Father, I bless thee that thou hast counted me worthy to receive my portion among the number of martyrs.' As for Alban, the first known British Christian martyr during one of the severe persecutions of the third century, he was first 'cruelly beaten, yet suffered he the same patiently, nay rather joyfully, for the Lord's sake', and was then beheaded. And so, it has continued in every generation. 'O The joy that the martyrs of Christ have felt', cried Richard Baxter, 'in the midst of the scorching flames!' Although made of flesh and blood like us, he continued, their souls could rejoice even while their bodies were burning. Of many examples, which could be given from the present century I choose only those mentioned by Sadhu Sundar Singh, the Indian Christian mystic and evangelist. He told, for instance, of a Tibetan evangelist,

Some of the readers of the paper may be asking the following questions. Doesn't Jesus tell his disciples that they will endure persecution from the world?⁴ Doesn't Jesus encourage them to take up their crosses and follow him, to lay down their lives for one another, to lose their lives for his sake?⁵ Don't the disciples rejoice after they have been released because they were able to suffer for Christ's name?⁶ Doesn't scripture tell us, that it is only through the refiner's fire that true purity can be found?⁷

This is all true, the Bible does say these things. Jesus, the very center of Christianity, does not pray for his Father to remove his disciples from the world, but rather to keep them from the evil one.⁸ There are theodicies based on this very presupposition, in trying to explain the

flogged by tormentors who then rubbed salt into his wounds, whose 'face shone with peace and joy,' and of another who, sewn into a damp yak skin and left in the sun for three days, 'was joyful all the time' and thanked God for the privilege of suffering for him. It is true that the Sadhu sometimes embellished or romanticized his stories, yet there seems no reason to doubt his testimony, from his own experience and others', that even in the midst of torture God gives his people a supernatural joy and peace." John R. W. Stott, *The Cross of Christ* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1986), 74-75. The asceticism which ran through the church also displays this positive attitude towards suffering in its work of perfection. Starvation and flagellation were both seen as ways to discipline the flesh in order to sanctify the soul. Suffering as part of the over-all good is also reflected in Augustine's theology, "This is 'the Augustinian notion that evil is a part of the larger picture of overall good.' Augustine places the blame for suffering on human sinfulness, but the cause in God's will." Even the Reformers support this position. Consider Luther's theology, "Thus Luther concludes that 'the touch of Christ sanctifies all the sufferings and sorrows of those who believe in him'" Robert A D Clancy, "Theology of the Cross: The Doctrine of Justification and the Problem of Human Suffering," *Currents in Theology and Mission* 21, no. 4 (1994): 268, 270. Take a look here at Clancy's final remarks proclaiming suffering as a gift from a loving God, "The theology of the cross always teaches us to suffer with the Christ who suffered for us. Nor is it helpful simply to point to the cross of Christ, for without the grace of God which declares this suffering to be for us, it remains a proclamation of the wrath of God upon sin. But when the theology of the cross, which assures us of our justification before God for the sake of him who suffered on the tree, is truly proclaimed to one who is afflicted, then suffering may be turned from a burden into a gift from a loving God." Clancy, "Theology of the Cross: The Doctrine of Justification and the Problem of Human Suffering," 272.

⁴ Matt 5:11-12

⁵ Matt 10:36,39; 16:24-25; Mar 8:3,35; Luk 9:23-24;

⁶ Acts 5:41

⁷ Mal 3:2-3; Zec 13:9.

⁸ John 17:15

existence of evil under the sovereignty of a “Good God.”⁹ But this is a short-sighted view of Christianity and the grand narrative of Scripture.

Suffering enters the world through sin. It is evil.¹⁰ The world was made perfect and good.¹¹ It was not until the consequences of the fall are pronounced that suffering is introduced to the world. There will be a war between the Devil’s offspring and those of the woman. The woman will give birth in pain. The man will have to toil and struggle to make the soil produce sustenance.¹² At the end of Scripture, when sin and evil are destroyed, there will be no more suffering. Every tear will be wiped away, no more death, no more sorrow, for the old order of things has passed away and the new has come.¹³ And if the bookends are not enough to convince the reader of the negativity of suffering, read the pages in between. When Jesus came in the incarnation, he spent his life saving (healing) people from suffering.¹⁴ He makes atonement for

⁹ This would include the soul-shaping theory of John Hick of theodicy which states that reason for evil in the world is to purify the soul. Mark S. M. Scott, "Suffering and Soul-Making: Rethinking John Hick's Theodicy," *The Journal of Religion* 90, no. 3 (2010): 319. The greater-good theodicy suggests that God, before the creation of the world, measured which world would have the least evil in it and created that one for the greater good of the cosmos. John S. Feinberg, *Theologies and Evil* (Washington D.C.: University Press of America Inc., 1979), 102-107.

¹⁰ “Hence it can be adduced that suffering is the result of sin, and a consequence of wrong choices. While the injudicious choices of Adam and Eve opened the door for sin, giving it resident status on this planet, it is however the flawed personal choices of individuals that are responsible for personal and communal sorrow such as addictions, genocide, war, abortions, and poverty (Prov 26:2; Rom 1:20; 6:23).” Kelvin Onongha, "Suffering, Salvation, and the Sovereignty of God: Toward a Theology of Suffering," *Journal of Adventist Mission Studies* 9, no. 2 (2013): 130.

¹¹ Gen 1:31

¹² Gen 3:13-19

¹³ Rev 21:4 Ranko Stefanovic also draws the reader’s attention back to Isa 25:8; 35:10; 65:19. Ranko Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ : Commentary on the Book of Revelation*, 2nd ed. (Berrien Springs, Mich.: Andrews University Press, 2009), 590.

¹⁴ Matt 4:24; 8:16; 12:15, 22; 15:22, 28, 30; 17:15,18; 19:2; 21:14 Mar 1:34; 5:34; 10:52; Luk 4:38-40; 5:15; 6:18; 8:48; 9:11; 9:42; 14:2-4; 18:42; 22:51

the human race to free them from suffering. He promises to come the second time to bring salvation to those who wait and ultimately remove all suffering from existence.¹⁵

This author does not deny that the context of a fallen world requires suffering to be used for the good of those who love God.¹⁶ This, however, does not make suffering in itself good. It is essential at the outset of this paper to set aside the falsity that suffering is positive, in order to suggest a threefold model of Salvation, which saves us from suffering.

Subjective and Objective Tension

The remaining issues mentioned earlier speak of a tension between the objective and subjective goals of salvation. The objective goals of three-phase salvation are focused on: justification through a penal-substitutionary atonement allowing God to forgive and maintain his internal integrity of love and holiness; sanctification making God's people holy, which in turn brings glory to their father in heaven; and glorification restores all things under God's sovereignty, thus re-establishing the original created order.

The subjective goals of a three-phase salvation on the other hand are based upon: justification as salvation from the subjective experience of suffering guilt and shame in the life of the believer; sanctification as the healing of the believer, which provides salvation from the suffering lying within the believer's area of influence; and glorification as the salvation from the suffering that is beyond the control of not only the individual believer, but corporate society as

¹⁵ Heb 9:28; Rev 21:4

¹⁶ Rom 8:28; "The idea that Christians should never suffer should be refuted since the Scriptures unambiguously teach that Christians are engaged in a cosmic conflict (Eph 6; 2 Cor 10:3-5). Because God can use suffering for spiritual maturity and to strengthen the faith of his children suffering should not be looked at as altogether evil, since God can transform it into something useful to serve his purposes." Onongha, "Suffering, Salvation, and the Sovereignty of God: Toward a Theology of Suffering," 134.

well.

Humanity lives in the midst of the short-term view. We experience suffering every day. As I prepare for the presentation at ASRS in 2025, I had recently lost my father-in-law. In fact, depending on the scheduling of the funeral, I may not be able to present this paper at all. Suffering, at this time, is very present and is very intense for many of us. For this reason, as we instruct our students at Kettering College, who are going into a field based on the relief of suffering, we find it necessary to invite them to process their own understanding of suffering. The first part of this paper will lay out a theological model for salvation as the relief of suffering. The second part of the paper will demonstrate a method through which we are attempting to engage our students in self-reflection around their own suffering narrative and how they view God as being or not being involved in their suffering.¹⁷

Part I: Three-Phase Salvation Model

Through this research, I seek to propose of three-phase salvation model, which provides salvation from the subjective human condition of suffering through the objective accomplishments of salvation. The three phases are Justification, Sanctification and Glorification. Justification saves the believer from the suffering of guilt and shame through the objective forgiveness of God purchased by the substitutionary sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Sanctification saves the believer and those around them from the suffering caused by the believer's own thoughts and actions through objectively bringing glory to God as the believer is

¹⁷ The majority of the first section of this paper is drawn from a previous presentation that I made at a theological symposium at Andrews University in 2017. The second section of the paper, however, is new for this conference and is based on student responses to an assignment for a course in the Spring of 2025.

made holy. Glorification saves the believer and the rest of the cosmos from the suffering that is beyond the control of individual and corporate society through the objective restoration of the government of God.

Justification: Salvation from the Suffering of Guilt and Shame

There is plenty of debate in the scholarly world as to what justification really is, when it happens, and how it takes place.¹⁸ The central focus of justification, however, seems to be the same. In some way, by the atoning death of Jesus on the cross, the sinner is pronounced or made

¹⁸ For a fuller description of this see James K. Beilby and Paul R. Eddy, eds., *Justification : Five Views* (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Academic, 2011).

righteous.¹⁹ There is forgiveness offered to the sinner who repents and believes.²⁰ Something needed to take place in the government of God in order to allow forgiveness of sin to be offered to the repentant sinner.²¹

On the objective side of this equation, the apparently divergent characteristics of God needed to be brought together to allow God to grant forgiveness.²² Sin is against the holiness of

¹⁹ This author takes the position that justification is a forensic process by which the sinner is declared righteous and has the righteousness of Christ imputed to them. Impartation, making someone righteous suggests an ontological change. This change is worked upon the soul through the accidental union of grace with the soul through which the Holy Spirit can then indwell or imprint upon the soul. In his analysis of Galtier, Gleason demonstrates the eastern fathers' pervasive sense of the Holy Spirit applied to all of creation in a state of grace. "P. Galtier states that the Fathers conceive the special presence of the inhabitation, not as a presence that results from our acts, but as an ontological presence that comes with the state of grace. 'They describe this presence under the image of an application, to the substance of the just soul, of the very substance of the divine Persons and by no means as an intellectual apprehension by man of their action upon him.'" Robert W. Gleason, *The Indwelling Spirit* (Staten Island, NY: Alba House, 1966), 33-34. For this to be true requires a dualistic anthropology which this author also rejects. Richard Davidson points out (drawing on insights from F. LeRon Shults) that, "in the last two centuries, biblical scholars have increasingly moved toward a consensus that both the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament provide a holistic model of the human person." Davidson then continues to explain the holistic relationship of the body and soul. Humans do not have a soul, rather they are a soul and humans do not have a body they are a body. This article will be published as a part of book published by the Biblical Research Institute. (Richard Davison, *The Nature of the Human Being from the Beginning: Genesis 1-11*, Biblical Research Institute. There is further evidence for this position in both the TWOT and the TDNT, as both describe the soul from a holistic point of view, including physical, mental, emotional, and moral concerns. "It must not be concluded from this study of *nepeš* that the OT presents man as physical only. There are other OT ideas to be considered in this connection: (1) the OT teaching concerning the "spirit" of man; (2) the OT teaching concerning the heart (*lēb*) of man; (3) the subject of the image of God (see *selem*) in man; and (4) the picture as given of man's relation to God." *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, electronic ed. ed. s.v. "1395 נֶפֶשׁ." "...is the usual term for a man's total nature, for what he is and not just what he has. This gives the term priority in the anthropological vocabulary, for the same cannot be said of either spirit, heart, or flesh. The classical text in Gn. 2:7 clearly expresses this truth when it calls man in his totality a *נֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה*. Perhaps in view of its over-logical formulation, this passage never became normative for the OT as a whole." *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, electronic ed. ed. The legal language in Paul is recognized even by those who do not accept a forensic interpretation as current or a full reading of Paul. John B. Cobb Jr. speaks about it this way, "Nevertheless, whereas the understanding of Paul in terms of the forensic doctrine of justification has been deeply illuminating of Christian life and has given valuable guidance to the church, the exhaustive translation of Paul's many-sided interpretation of the faithful's relation to Christ in these terms has also impoverished the church." John B. Cobb and David John Lull, *Romans*, Chalice Commentaries for Today. (St. Louis, Mo.: Chalice Press, 2005).

²⁰ Acts 2:30; 1 John 4:9.

²¹ See next footnote.

²² Stott lays this out clearly when describing the different options for who the ransom of Christ's death can be paid to. He points out that some, like Origen, have said that the ransom was paid to the Devil, therefore setting us free from the ownership of Satan as the prince of this world. Secondly, Stott describes the possibility of the ransom being paid to the law of God, so to speak. Sin is a transgression of the law and the wages of sin in death, so the law

God.²³ The justice of God calls for the consequences of sin, which Scripture tells us is death.²⁴

On the other hand, the great covenantal love of God and his long-suffering mercy show his longing to be reconciled to his children who have gone astray.²⁵ Justification is the phase of salvation when these two characteristics of God come together through the substitutionary atonement of the death of Jesus Christ. Justice, which demands the penalty for sin, is paid by the death of Jesus; thus, the mercy and forgiveness of God can be extended to the fallen human race.²⁶

On the subjective side of Justification, the repentant sinner is either made or declared righteous, depending on the theological system defining it.²⁷ This righteousness means that a

requires the debt of death to be paid. Thirdly, however, and most strongly Stott points to the idea that the ransom is being paid to God himself. God's character is presented in a dialectic between justice and mercy, law and grace, holiness and love. Stott finishes this discussion with a focus on "God's holy love." Because Jesus is God, God is actually paying the ransom to himself so that the integrity of his character can have justice met and therefore allow God to offer the long-suffering mercy and forgiveness that he longs to give. Stott, *The Cross of Christ*, 112-132. This same dialectic presentation can also be found in Norman Gulley's 3rd Volume of his systematic theology. Norman R. Gulley, *Systematic Theology: Creation, Christ, Salvation* (Berrien Springs, Mich.: Andrews University Press, 2012), 602.

²³ In the following quote Stott is referencing: Hab. 1:13; Is: 59:1; Ex. 33:20-23; Jdg. 13:22. "That God is holy is foundational to biblical religion. So is the corollary that sin is incompatible with his holiness. His eyes are 'too pure to look on evil and he 'cannot tolerate wrong'. Therefore, our sins effectively separate us from him, so that his face is hidden from us and he refuses to listen to our prayers. In consequence, it was clearly understood by the biblical authors that no human being could ever set eyes on God and survive the experience. They might perhaps be permitted to see his 'back' but not his 'face,' the sunshine but not the sun." Stott, *The Cross of Christ*, 102.

²⁴ Rom 3:23; 6:23.

²⁵ Hos 11:8-9; Stott, *The Cross of Christ*, 129. John C. Peckham describes the Hebrew term *hesed* translated as the mercy and loving kindness of God often used in the setting of covenantal relationships between God and his people in the Old Testament. He also demonstrates that this love is fore-conditional, extended to all people but possibly rejected by people who would break his covenant. John Peckham, *The Love of God : A Canonical Model* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2015), 83-85. One might also say that the covenantal love of God would also be conditional based on the evaluative characteristic of that love which chooses to love in such a way that Christ would satisfy the justice of God so that this mercy is willingly extended to humanity.

²⁶ Raoul Dederen, ed. *Handbook of Seventh-Day Adventist Theology*, Commentary Reference Series ; V. 12. (Hagerstown, MD: Review & Herald Pub. Association, 2000), 180.

²⁷ See footnote 16.

forgiveness of the transgressor's guilt has been offered and received. The debt has been paid, and therefore, the new believer is saved from suffering under the guilt of their sins.²⁸ There is a true sense of relief and freedom from condemnation, which the new Christian is assured of by this process of justification.²⁹

The relief from the suffering of guilt, however, is not the only salvation from suffering that is found in justification. There is also a relief from the suffering of shame. Shame has become a more significant issue lately.³⁰ This is true both for the purpose of mission to non-Western cultures as well as the general post-modern “shame culture.”³¹

Guilt is the suffering that someone experiences when they have done something sinful. Shame is the suffering of someone believing that they themselves are sinful.³² Because they are

²⁸ Lev 5:13; Matt 26:28; Acts 2:38; 13:38; 26:18; Rom 4:7; Eph 1:7; Col 1:14; 1 Jn 2:12.

²⁹ Rom 8:1.

³⁰ “The problem: Those reflecting on the atonement do not seem to be considering the implications of shame; those reflecting on shame do not seem to be considering its implications for the atonement. It would be helpful to introduce these people to one another! And therein lies the opportunity: to bring together the insights of each group in order to suggest a new understanding of the atonement that can respond to shame in a meaningful way.” Brad A. Binau, “When Shame Is the Question, How Does the Atonement Answer?,” *Journal of Pastoral Theology* 12, no. 1 (2002): 90.

³¹ Herbert Hofer describes the difference between a guilt-based society and a shame-based society: “Often the distinction has been made between a guilt-based society and a shame-based society. In the guilt-based society, individuals have internalized a set of moral standards, and they feel personal guilt if they fail to live up to those standards. In the shame-based society, individuals are very aware of the judgment of their social peers and authorities. If they violate these people's expectations, they feel great shame. The motivation to moral living, therefore, is the approval and acceptance of their community. In a guilt-based society, one might feel motivated to live by certain moral standards purely on the basis of his/her conscience.” Hofer recognizes, based on the critique of a colleague, that this is not just a non-western culture issue but shame is more largely recognized in the post-modern culture. Herbert E. Hofer, “Gospel Proclamation of the Ascended Lord,” *Missiology* 33, no. 4 (2005): 436, 438.

³² “To define shame, it is also necessary to contrast it with guilt, since the two are so easily and so often confused. The work of Piers and Singer remains the classic point of reference for this task, making two key points. First: guilt results from a transgression of boundaries, while shame results when we fall short of an ideal. Second: different fears are implied by guilt and shame. Behind guilt stands the fear of punishment. Cross a boundary and I will be put back in my place, usually painfully. Behind shame, however, stands the fear of abandonment. Fail to live up to an ideal and be seen as deficient, and I will show myself to be unlovable. In addition to implying different fears, Helen Block Lewis pointed out that guilt and shame raise different questions. Guilt asks: What have I *done*?

sinful, they are unable to be reconciled to God and unworthy to be in a relationship with him.³³

Justification brings relief to shame as well as guilt. The sinner now righteous and free from the debt of sin is also declared a child of God. Not only is their record of sinful actions cleared, so also their identity as a sinner is changed to a child of God and therefore heir to the kingdom.³⁴

In the first phase of justification, the objective accomplishment of the justice of God being met allows for his mercy to extend forgiveness to the sinful human race. This objective accomplishment then offers the relief from the subjective experience of suffering under the guilt of sinful actions as well as a shameful identity as a sinner. Instead, the believer can now have forgiveness and a new identity as a child of God and heir to the kingdom. Forgiveness and a new identity are only the beginning of salvation. Now that the believer is no longer under condemnation, they are enabled to live out their new identity through the second phase of salvation – sanctification.

Sanctification: Salvation from the Suffering Directly Caused by the Believer

Sanctification, whether concurrent with or subsequent to justification, is the process of making the believer more and more holy. Objectively, the Father in heaven is glorified by the

while shame asks: What have I done? Guilt questions our actions, but shame questions us as actors. To distinguish shame from guilt it is crucially important to grasp guilt's emphasis on wrong doing as opposed to shame's emphasis on wrong being." Binau, "When Shame Is the Question, How Does the Atonement Answer?," 94.

³³ Binau defines shame as a condition which creates the fear of abandonment or that the person will not be worthy of relationship. This condition of shame can result in estrangement from God and from other people. Binau, "When Shame Is the Question, How Does the Atonement Answer?," 93, 97.

³⁴ Jn 1:12; Rom 8:14; Gal 3:26; 4:7; Phil 2:15; 1 Jn 3:1; Dederen, ed. *Handbook of Seventh-Day Adventist Theology*, 288-289.

good works or holy actions done by the believer in his name.³⁵ It is through the loving actions of the disciples that Jesus says the world will know that he was sent from the Father.³⁶ Paul wrote that everything a believer does is to be done for the glory of God.³⁷ This process of change in the life of the believer is only possible by the power of the Spirit of God working through the believer.³⁸ God is, therefore, directly worthy of glory and honor for the transformation of the believer.³⁹

Subjectively, this process of holiness in the believer can be called a process of wholeness.⁴⁰ Salvation as healing is a prominent feature both in Scripture as well as current theological discussion. In the Scripture, both the Hebrew and the Greek words translated as salvation have the same root word as the words that are translated as healing.⁴¹ Repeatedly in the

³⁵ Matt 5:16.

³⁶ Jn 13:15.

³⁷ 1 Cor 10:31.

³⁸ Phil 2:12-13; 2 Th 2:13; 1 Pet 1:2; Hoefer, "Gospel Proclamation of the Ascended Lord," 442.

³⁹ Rom 4:20; 2Cor 4:4; Phil 1:11; Even the obedient acts of Jesus brought glory to the Father: John 11:40; 17:1.

⁴⁰ Binau speaks of wholeness of relationship through reconciliation. Binau, "When Shame Is the Question, How Does the Atonement Answer?," 101. William M. Greathouse defines perfection as wholeness. William M. Greathouse, *Wholeness in Christ : Toward a Biblical Theology of Holiness* (Kansas City, Mo.: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1998), 30. Collins recognizes this in the theology of John Wesley as well. Kenneth J. Collins, *The Scripture Way of Salvation : The Heart of John Wesley's Theology* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1997), 174. Ted Peters engages the current philosophical thought regarding the need for wholeness in the midst of fragmentation. Ted Peters, "David Bohm, Postmodernism, and the Divine," *Zygon* 20, no. 2 (1985): 214-215.

⁴¹ This is true not just of the biblical languages but other languages around the world. "Healing means salvation and peace. In Hebrew, Greek and the other Indo-European languages, salvation has the meaning of integrity, integrality, authenticity, fullness, wholeness, realized totality. The person saved is freed from all alienating elements, and is authentically himself/herself. Peace, shalom, has a similar meaning of wellbeing, wholeness, having the strength to be oneself. And what is true for one person is true for the whole community, and indeed for the world, as the prophets saw. And healing is associated with righteousness (Isa. 58: 8), that right relationship with God and with our fellow human beings which makes for a true community of sharing." Philip A. Potter, "Healing and Salvation," *The Ecumenical Review* 33, no. 4 (1981): 333.

gospels, Jesus is the source of healing for those who come in contact with him.⁴² These healings are often in combination with a proclamation of forgiveness and/or an encouragement for the person to refrain from sin. The holiness of refraining from sin is a possibility because of the restoration or wholeness that has been found in the individual's encounter with Jesus. The demoniac, now healed and freed from the suffering of demon possession, is able to live a life that reduces his own suffering as well as those who come into contact with him.⁴³ The greed of a tax collector is healed through his encounter with Jesus, and his responsive holy actions relieve the suffering of those he has cheated as well as his own suffering under a bad reputation.⁴⁴

In theological conversations, healing is a focus of salvation as well. The World Confederation of Churches has found healing as a banner under which they can unite in their efforts within the world.⁴⁵ Pentecostal theology has often made the connection between the atonement and healing.⁴⁶ Healing through social justice is a cause close to the hearts of feminist theology and liberation theology.⁴⁷ Adventism has long held to the ministry of healing.⁴⁸

⁴² Matt 4:24; 8:16; 12:15, 22; 15:22, 28, 30; 17:15,18; 19:2; 21:14 Mar 1:34; 5:34; 10:52; Luk 4:38-40; 5:15; 6:18; 8:48; 9:11; 9:42; 14:2-4; 18:42; 22:51.

⁴³ Mark 5:15.

⁴⁴ Luke 19:8-9.

⁴⁵ Horsfjord provides a historical account of the CWME and WCC transitioning from a kingdom view of Salvation to one of Healing. He suggests the will open greater doors of communication with Pentecostals and other world religions. Vebjørn Horsfjord, "Healing and Salvation in Late Modernity: The Use and Implication of Such Terms in the Ecumenical Movement," *International Review of Mission* 96, no. 380-381 (2007): 10-11.

⁴⁶ John Christopher Thomas shares a brief history of the Pentecostal tradition tying the atonement to healing and then provides a study on this connection in the Gospel of John, particularly focused on Jesus' reference to being lifted up as the snake was in the desert. John Christopher Thomas, "Healing in the Atonement: A Johannine Perspective," *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 14, no. 1 (2005).

⁴⁷ Horsfjord, "Healing and Salvation in Late Modernity: The Use and Implication of Such Terms in the Ecumenical Movement," 17; Binau, "When Shame Is the Question, How Does the Atonement Answer?," 101-102.

⁴⁸ Ellen Gould Harmon White, *The Ministry of Healing*, Christian Home Library. (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press, 1942), 62. George W. Reid, "Health and Healing," in *Handbook of Seventh-Day Adventist Theology*,

The subjective relief of suffering as a result of sanctification is not limited to physical healing. Spiritual healing, emotional healing, social healing, and addiction recovery are a few of the examples of healing which is offered through the power of the Holy Spirit in the work of sanctification. The suffering that is relieved through the transformation of holiness affects the suffering that is within the sphere of influence of the individual or society that is being sanctified. An individual who is healed from an addiction is saved from the suffering they are causing themselves as well as all of those who are affected within their circle of influence. A community made up of individuals who are in the process of sanctification can bring relief from suffering to those who are within their sphere of influence. This could be a neighborhood, a city, or a people group across the world, depending on the size of the community that is involved.⁴⁹

The objective accomplishment of glorifying the Father through the Holy Spirit working out sanctification in the lives of believers brings relief to the subjective experience of suffering

ed. Raoul Dederen(Hagerstown, MD: Review & Herald Pub. Association, 2000).

⁴⁹ After listing a various list of the different kinds of suffering that could be considered, Harsfjord suggests two different types of healing that could be administered. There are implications here for both individual and societal based relief of suffering. "Against this background, it is possible to discern two different modalities of healing as described in the texts under study, viz. one that primarily works on the experience of suffering, and one that works on the causes. In the former category we find the laying on of hands, other liturgical expressions of healing (for example the sacrament of anointing the sick), the healing of memories, caring for the sick and terminally ill, and assurances of the forgiveness of sins. Prayer for the sick should also be placed here, although people may differ in their understanding of how it works on the causes of suffering. The other category, concerned with the causes, contains such activities as medical care, the prevention of violence and war, alleviating poverty, improving sanitation and education, working for access to medicine and health care, and casting out evil spirits." Horsfjord, "Healing and Salvation in Late Modernity: The Use and Implication of Such Terms in the Ecumenical Movement," 15-16. Potter asks some significant questions which the Christian Community needs to think about in relation to it's influence and ability to bring healing. "The question for me is: Are we and our churches such healing communities? Are we really engaging ourselves with God's controversy with those who spread sickness around? Are we enabling our sick people and societies to diagnose their true sickness and find the resources for healing? Are we prepared to place ourselves beside the sick, the deprived, the oppressed with the healing power of God? Are we ready to join with our Lord in his self-giving struggle with evil even to the cross in order that healing, reconciliation and wholeness may become manifest in a world which is sick unto death, because, as Kierkegaard so powerfully asserted, it has no self before God and is not transparently grounded in God in that faith which is health?" Potter, "Healing and Salvation," 339.

through the healing salvation worked out in the lives of those who are being transformed. This is true both for the individual believer and the corporate community of those believers. The holiness lived out is able to relieve the suffering that is within the sphere of influence of these believers. There is, however, suffering that is beyond this sphere of influence, thus the third phase of salvation – glorification.

Glorification: Salvation from Cosmic Suffering

Glorification is the phase of salvation that restores the creative order of the cosmos to a state free of the rebellion of sin. On the objective side of this phase, the government of God is restored, his sovereignty recognized throughout the universe, and his character recognized as just. On the subjective side, the suffering that is beyond the sphere of influence of the individual believer and the Christian community is relieved in the destruction of sin and evil from the universe.

The suffering that is beyond the influence of the sanctification of the believer can be demonstrated in four different categories. The first category is still found within the believer, but beyond their control. The bent towards sin must be removed, the suffering that comes through the continued temptation on the fallen nature of humanity can only be relieved at the moment of entire sanctification.⁵⁰ This final change within the believer takes place at the moment of the

⁵⁰ Collins points out that in John Wesley's theology justification is a deliverance from the guilt of sin, regeneration (or sanctification) from the power of sin, and entire sanctification (or glorification) is from the being of sin. Kenneth J. Collins, *John Wesley : A Theological Journey* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2003), 190. There is a need for humanity to be delivered from the being of sin or one might say the bent of sin. Wesley held that entire sanctification was only possible through God's power, although he was not sure at what time in history or a believer's life it would take place. Because he held to an anthropological dualism, the entire sanctification has to happen sometime before the soul ascended to heaven. So Wesley suggested that it might happen during a believers life or at the moment of death. Collins, *The Scripture Way of Salvation : The Heart of John Wesley's Theology*, 177, 180. An Anthropological monism allows for the entire transformation to take place at the time of the resurrection at

second coming, according to scripture, when the dead in Christ will rise incorruptible and those who remain alive will be transformed in the twinkling of an eye. Corruption will put on incorruption, and mortal shall put on immortality.⁵¹

The second category is the moral evil which comes from the free will choice of other people in the world who choose wickedness rather than the grace of God and continue to perpetrate evil upon their own sphere of influence. The third category, beyond the influence of the sanctified believer, is that of natural evil.⁵² The natural disasters that are a result of a creation in a fallen condition are beyond the control of the believer. The ecological damage that has been done by humanity upon the earth, which is now irreversible, would also fall into this category.⁵³ The fourth category would be demonic evil. The suffering that has been caused by the Devil and his fallen angels upon the cosmos.⁵⁴

the second coming of Jesus. The soul would have been non-existent until it is recreated at that time.

⁵¹ 1 Cor 15:53-54.

⁵² Paul L. Gavrilyuk describes the different thoughts on natural evil held by the Patristics: "It may be objected that while free choice could account for the existence of moral evil, the cause of natural evil was left unexplained. This challenge was met in different ways. Some fathers replied that the human choice of evil had tragic and far-reaching consequences for the rest of creation. Others argued that "natural evil" was a misnomer: strictly speaking, all evils were unnatural. Augustine proposed that such disasters as fires and hurricanes represent the working of natural forces that are inherently good but can be misdirected so as to harm humans. Others speculated, drawing upon Stoic views, that natural disasters are not evil at all, because no evil intention is involved. Still others deferred to the universal religious insight that natural disasters are a form of divine punishment for human disobedience. God sent natural disasters to admonish, correct, or restrain, and to mete out retribution for sin. Origen more imaginatively hinted that natural disasters were a part of the demonic revolt against God. On this analysis, natural evil is reducible to moral evil in its demonic form." Harrison and Hunter, eds., *Suffering and Evil in Early Christian Thought*, 5.

⁵³ Ted Peters conveys the ecological disaster which humanity across the globe is leaving for future generations. He connects this the concepts of both ecological and temporal fragmentation. Humanity has separated itself from the rest of the creation and one generation has set itself up above another, thus taking the resources it desires without thought of future consequences. Ted Peters, *Sin : Radical Evil in Soul and Society* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1994), 132-133.

⁵⁴ See references to possible interpretations of natural evil in previous footnote. Also Referenced in: Onongha, "Suffering, Salvation, and the Sovereignty of God: Toward a Theology of Suffering," 132-133. In the introduction to the book "The Story of Redemption" we find this statement as well: "The narrative is based upon the

These last three categories of suffering that are to be relieved in the phase of glorification will be done at the end of the millennium. Revelation speaks of the New Jerusalem descending from heaven. The Devil leads the wicked in one final charge to attempt to take the city of God, and fire that will come down and consume both the demonic and wicked humanity. It will also cleanse the earth so that it can be remade.⁵⁵ While the category of entire sanctification is supported by other systems of theology.⁵⁶ The relief of suffering from the other eschatological categories of suffering is a unique contribution that Adventism has to offer to the conversation.

Part of this is the interpretation of the sequence of events concerning the millennium. But even more than this is the doctrine of hell as annihilation.⁵⁷ If hellfire does not annihilate the demonic and the wicked, then there is suffering that remains for eternity. There are various suggestions on what this torment might look like. Some suggest that it is a torturous place of literal fire where the wicked will suffer for eternity. Others say that the fire is not literal and is better described as a place of desolation, darkness, and eternal separation from God.⁵⁸ But either

scriptural theme of the age-long conflict between divine and Satanic agencies for the control of man's will and destiny. Here is reviewed the story of man's creation and his fall into sin, also of the demonic control that has inspired wars and instigated crime and universal suffering and tragedy. At the heart of the book is the redemption of man wrought by Christ on the cross." Ellen Gould Harmon White, *Story of Redemption* (1977), 9.

⁵⁵ Not only the Devil and his angels are cast into the lake of fire but also a personified enemy of Death and Hades are also abolished at this time. Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ : Commentary on the Book of Revelation*, 580, 582.

⁵⁶ See previous footnote on John Wesley's theology.

⁵⁷ Gregg Allison gives a brief overview of the current voices supporting annihilation in his *Historical Theology*, including John Stott, John Wenham, and Edward Fudge. Gregg R. Allison and Wayne A. Grudem, *Historical Theology : An Introduction to Christian Doctrine : A Companion to Wayne Grudem's Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2011), 720-721.

⁵⁸ Allison points out that even Calvin was open to considering some of these other metaphors concerning punishment. Allison and Grudem, *Historical Theology : An Introduction to Christian Doctrine : A Companion to Wayne Grudem's Systematic Theology*, 712.

way, suffering continues forever. The doctrine of hell as annihilation, however, allows for the objective accomplishment of God's complete sovereignty by the complete removal of sin and evil. It also provides the relief of the subjective experience of suffering from the cosmos forever.

There are those in their pursuit of healing and the restoration of the world who seek to move away from what they call God's coercive power.⁵⁹ They seek a persuasive view of God's love and movement in the world. From an Arminian, Wesleyan, Adventist perspective, it is true that God's power and love are not coercive in the sense that those who are saved and those who are reprobate are predetermined. But the limitations that are placed on God by the open/process view of a persuasive love limit the objective accomplishment of God, ensuring an eschaton without sin. By this limitation, it also removes the possibility of the relief of the subjective experience of suffering, which these open systems long for.

Now that the theological model of a three-phase salvation of suffering has been laid out for the reader's consideration. We can turn to the practical application of how we might apply this to the classroom setting.

Part II: Instruction through Suffering Narratives

Kettering College is a healthcare college preparing students to be certified and hired within an industry based on the relief of suffering. Based on the model described above, healthcare workers are agents of salvation. More specifically, agents of sanctification as they are currently relieving the suffering that is within the healthcare community's sphere of influence. This can be an overwhelming workplace to step into as a new graduate. Many of these students

⁵⁹ Binau, "When Shame Is the Question, How Does the Atonement Answer?," 104. John B. Cobb, *Jesus' Abba: The God Who Has Not Failed* (2016), 138-139.

have not faced the kinds of suffering that they will soon begin to see on a daily basis.

As religion faculty, we recognize the need to guide them through the process of understanding suffering and the way that God interacts with humanity in their suffering. This is true of the patient care courses that we offer. It is also true of the classes on the doctrines of the Seventh-day Adventist church. It is important to keep the objective and subjective aspects of the learning experience in mind as we do this. This is why we have chosen to create, implement, and evaluate a suffering narrative assignment. We have learned some things along the way about best practices with this kind of assignment. I have also been given permission to share some quotes from some of my students in RELB 101 Fundamentals of Seventh-day Adventist Belief and the Healing Ministry of Jesus in the spring semester of 2025. This section of the paper will be structured as follows: the description of the assignment, best practices that we have learned along the way, and student examples of learning.

Description of Assignment

The following is the description of the assignment that is provided for students in the syllabus of the class for Spring 2025.

Suffering Reflection Paper (3-5 pages)

One of the primary theological/biblical teachings we will be looking at this semester is the way in which we understand the relationship between God and the suffering of the world. To explore this on a personal level, you will write a reflection paper based on a personal story of suffering, the different theories of how God relates to suffering in Richard Rice's book "Suffering and the Search for Meaning," and one of the four gospels in the New Testament. This paper will be divided into these three sections.

1. Write/tell a story of suffering that you experienced in your own life. This could be because of something that happened to you or to someone close to you which caused you emotional suffering because you were a witness to it.
2. The Second section of the paper will need to be done in three steps: First, read Richard Rice's book "Suffering and the Search for Meaning." Second, reflect on your story of suffering by identifying which "response" to suffering in the book you were relying on (if any) during that time of suffering. Third, reflect on which "response" to suffering you would choose in a future time of suffering in your life given the understanding you have gained from the book.
3. The third section of the paper requires a couple of steps as well: First, choose and read one of the four gospels in the bible (Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John) and take note of at least 3 stories in that gospel where you can see a connection to your own suffering story. Second, reflect/write on why you chose that particular gospel and apply something that you read in your chosen gospel to your story of suffering.⁶⁰

Structurally, make sure to include:

- **double-spaced, times new roman 12pt font, 1" margins**
- Title page
- Introduction (1-2 paragraphs)

⁶⁰ As we read through some of the material from the sample students for this paper you will see moments of what some have called bibliotherapy as students read the stories of the gospels and identify with the suffering of one or more of the characters within the narrative. This is particularly true in the identification that students found in the suffering of Jesus. For other resources and discussion of bibliotherapy see: Katrina Bath, "Insights in Trauma-Informed Pedagogy," in *Trauma-Informed Pedagogy in Higher Education : A Faculty Guide for Teaching and Learning*, ed. Earnest Stromberg (New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2023). Another demonstration of the potential for making use of the biblical text in this way is demonstrated in the use of shared narratives within the context of spiritual direction. Janet K. Ruffing, *To Tell the Sacred Tale: Spiritual Direction and Narrative* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2011).

- Body - Includes the three sections above (3-5 pages)
- Conclusion (1-2 paragraphs)

Best Practices Learned

Trauma-informed education suggests that we do the best that we can to provide a safe space for students to be able to learn.⁶¹ This includes monitoring the campus and environment for safety concerns. It also includes the practices that we use within the classrooms. A safe atmosphere includes practices of acceptance and affirmation. It also includes emotional awareness and intelligence from the professor to acknowledge the potential emotional triggers that students may face within a particular class.⁶² Within religion classes, this can begin by simply acknowledging that religion as a subject can be triggering for some individuals. Depending on their background and the way that religion was approached by their caretakers,

⁶¹ “A program, organization, or system that is trauma-informed realizes the widespread impact of trauma and understands potential paths for recovery; recognizes the signs and symptoms of trauma in clients, families, staff, and others involved with the system; and responds by fully integrating knowledge about trauma into policies, procedures, and practices, and seeks to actively resist re-traumatization.” Ernest Stromberg, *Trauma-Informed Pedagogy in Higher Education : A Faculty Guide for Teaching and Learning* (New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2023), 13.

There have been significant studies done on bringing trauma narratives into the humanities classroom space. These practices have also had their critics in regards to whether it is actually helpful for students. With mental illness difficulties increasing across the nation amongst college students, it is important to have a well-informed pedagogy for higher education and trauma. The following volume dives into the potential pedagogical considerations around trauma and the classroom from multiple higher-education perspectives. Stromberg, *Trauma-Informed Pedagogy*.

⁶² “Helping to establish connections and relationships may also mitigate the effects of “othering.” In one study of 18 teachers who co-designed and/or adapted trauma-informed positive education for trauma-impacted primary and secondary school students, through qualitative analysis it was revealed that teachers designed their classrooms and adapted their interactive style to facilitate attachment and build classroom relationships (Brunzell et al., 2019). In higher-education classrooms, instructors can be mindful of body positioning in relation to students that can contribute to power differentials, create activities that enhance group cohesion, and identify ways to anchor students positively in one’s own mind to create unconditional positive regard and more tolerance when responding to challenging student behaviors.” Stromberg, *Trauma-Informed Pedagogy*, 18.

students may find themselves feeling anxious, fearful, angry, or other fight/flight/freeze responses.⁶³

When inviting students to reflect on their own suffering narrative, this potential of emotional triggering is heightened. We have found that some students, often with the most painful stories, have a difficult time setting boundaries around the narratives that they choose to share within this assignment. In an attempt to work within the practices of trauma-informed teaching and in response to the feedback that we have received from students, we have developed the following practices around this assignment. First, instruct students regarding the audience who will be reading the narrative. Second, advise students not to write a narrative that would cause them to experience a re-traumatization of their own experience. Third, keep the narratives confidential between the student and professor.

Remember the Audience

When instructing the students to write this assignment, we have chosen to remind the

⁶³ To demonstrate the need for awareness of trauma-informed classroom practices, notice that the peak exposure of traumatic events happens among high school and college-aged students. “The peak age of trauma exposure is 16 to 20 years of age (Breslau et al., 2008), and there is considerable evidence that the vast majority, in the range of up to 89%, of college students have experienced a potentially traumatic event (Anders et al., 2012; Frazier et al., 2009; Read et al., 2011). One study of over 3,000 matriculating students aged 18 to 24 at two mid-sized public universities in the northeastern and southeastern United States found that 66% of students reported exposure to trauma that met clinical criteria; 35% experienced a life threatening illness, 34% experienced the sudden death of a loved one, 26% were exposed to an accident/natural disaster/fire, 24% experienced physical violence, 7% experienced sexual assault, 1% were exposed to combat, while 20% reported another type of psychological trauma (Read et al., 2011). The average number of traumatic events was 1.5, with 23% of students reporting one event, 20% of students reporting two events, and 25% of students reporting three or more events (Read et al., 2011). These rates increase when examining community college students. In a combined sample of 842 undergraduate students at a large public university and 242 students at a community college, the mean number of potentially traumatic events meeting clinical criteria was 3; community college students reported a significantly higher total number of potentially traumatic events than university students, as well as more exposure to witnessing family violence, being threatened, intimate partner violence, witnessing violence, childhood physical abuse, sexual abuse/assault, physical assault, and being robbed or mugged with threat (Anders et al., 2012).” Stromberg, *Trauma-Informed Pedagogy*, 15.

students that what they are writing will be read by their professor. This means that they need to make a wise selection regarding the suffering narrative that they choose to share. If the narrative they are planning to share is not one that they would like their professor to know, they are advised to choose a different story to write. This may mean that the students may need to choose a suffering story that feels rather tame in nature. They may need to refrain from telling a story of abuse or significant loss in their lives and choose to share a story around the stress of schoolwork, losing their keys/phone, or another less volatile story. As instructors, we need to be mindful of this choice and make sure that we do not downplay the narrative that they have selected as not being a “significant” suffering narrative. The student may choose to write a story about a suffering experience that they observed within their family or circle of friends.

Avoid Re-traumatization

Students need to not only choose their story based on the audience that will be reading the story, but also based on the possibility that resharing a story that is too painful to them may re-traumatize them in the writing process itself. Sharing a narrative, whether in person or in writing, can bring the storyteller back into the experiential space in which they originally encountered the trauma in the first place. Students are, therefore, encouraged to choose the story that they share with emotional wisdom to mindfully care for themselves through the process.

It is also important for the professor to keep in mind the effect it will have on them when they read these suffering stories. Our faculty have experienced times of significant tears or rage as we witness the suffering stories that the students share with us. Faculty must also implement this instruction process with mindful self-care. Secondary trauma amongst care professionals and care-providers recognizes the potential for caregivers to pick up emotional triggers within their

own environmental experiences at the time that they witness the suffering of another. It is important for faculty to have practices in place to be aware of the signs of trauma and compassion fatigue.

Keeping the Assignments Confidential

There is a healing available through the sharing of stories. It can provide a great deal of relief for someone to be able to share and process the suffering that they have gone through with another person. Based on the potential good of communal sharing, we have had faculty choose to make this suffering narrative project a shared experience amongst students through in-person and online discussion boards. There can be great healing in sharing a story; however, we have discovered that this is not helpful in the classroom setting.

Even though the previous two warnings of audience choice and not re-traumatizing the teller. Students continue to have a difficult time filtering what stories they choose to share. When a student disregards these boundaries and chooses to write the difficult story anyway, they tend to also feel all the more vulnerable when the story is shared. There will also be students who feel protective of the vulnerable student. Both of these scenarios tend to create negative feedback for the professor because they “required” the assignment and the sharing of the suffering experience within a public setting.

We have, therefore, chosen to keep these assignments confidential between students and the faculty member only, while continuing to offer the same boundaried directions of audience choice and avoiding re-traumatization. Feedback to students concerning these suffering stories is also a point of careful consideration. I recommend keeping grading responses to statements of active listening and possibly specific mechanical comments, such as page length or missing

components. Offering solutions and even encouragement for the students to see a counselor can be seen by some students as overstepping.

We have a resource page for all classes available within the Canvas modules for counseling services. We are also considering putting together a list of local resources to help students who may choose to seek help. I would caution that these resources should be offered in a general way to all students at different times throughout the semester. Unless a faculty has a particularly good relationship with a student and it seems right to make a personal recommendation, students tend to see a referral as outside of the faculty's role. There are situational concerns in play here, depending on who the faculty member is and what type of trust they have developed with the student in question.

Now that we have taken into consideration some of the lessons that we have learned along the way, we will turn to the last section of this paper, samples of student papers.

Student Papers from Spring Semester 2025.

Let me begin by stating that I was given specific permission to anonymously share quotes from specific students for this conference. Considering my third point of advice above, I wanted to make sure confidentiality was protected.

To keep with the theme of this paper around the three-phase salvation from suffering, I will be sharing examples from students' papers that demonstrate the past (justification), present (sanctification), and future (glorification) relief from suffering that comes through this model of salvation. The use of suffering narratives is particularly adept at offering temporal identity

development and potential healing for the storyteller.⁶⁴

The assignment invites the student to create a spiritual autobiography.⁶⁵ They reflect on the suffering that they have encountered in the past and the way that they viewed God's interaction with that past suffering. They are then encouraged to process that past suffering from a present standpoint through reflection on biblical and theological material. Finally, they are to synthesize their suffering experience and the theological reflection to inform the potential moments of suffering that they will face in the future. This kind of spiritual-suffering identity will hopefully support them as they accompany others through the suffering they will encounter in the field of healthcare.

Evidence of Justification – The relief from the suffering of Guilt and Shame

One of our students related a story from childhood in which she chose not to apply for a scholarship for school and even though all the other children who applied for the scholarship received it. She realized the weight that her wrong choice had placed upon her father to pay for her schooling. She focused on the sacrifice of Jesus for the forgiveness of sins as the relief that she found in the forgiveness of the wrong choice that she had made.⁶⁶

⁶⁴ The temporal nature of a story with a plot that moves from beginning to end has the potential to assist the storyteller in interpreting the identity narratively for good or for ill. Ruffing, *To Tell the Sacred Tale: Spiritual Direction and Narrative*, 89,110. There is also great potential for the healing, reframing, or restoration of a person's identity through the reinterpretation of that same story. Daniel Taylor, *Tell Me a Story: The Life-Shaping Power of Our Stories* (Nyack, NY Bog Walk Books, 2001).

⁶⁵ "The narrative form of spiritual autobiography, invented by St. Augustine in his famous Confessions, has most directly influenced the spiritual-direction narrative. Augustine adopts from Roman prose the literary form of the journey, a narrative of dramatic outer events, and applies it to the drama and intensity of his inner life.¹¹ Augustine shifts the drama of salvation history to its microcosmic form, showing how it plays out in his personal life. This personal focus expresses the Christian conviction that every person has unique worth and value because God is concerned with each of us." Ruffing, *To Tell the Sacred Tale: Spiritual Direction and Narrative*, 63.

⁶⁶ Student #1, "Suffering Reflection Paper," Student Submission, 2025, Humanities and Social Sciences,

A second student expressed the grief that he suffered through the loss of his grandfather. His grandfather was his only father figure, and he laments the loss of a potential mentor to help shape him into the man that he wishes to be, and someone who could have introduced him to faith. There seems to be an underlying shame around his unformed identity.⁶⁷

Anxiety and shame mixed together for yet another student who was having panic attacks at track meets to the point of purging her stomach before each run. She had a friend ask her if she ever prayed for relief from the panic attacks.

“I believed I was suffering from the consequences of my own choices and that they were just not good enough for God so why should I work to have a relationship with God? How could he help me when he was allowing me to suffer so much. I explained this to my friend and he started praying for me and bringing me to church to try to show me that God is so ever-loving.”⁶⁸

The shame that she was caught up in was relieved through the simple prayers of her friend, and she found the love of God in the peace the prayers brought her.

One of our older students related the legacy of loss that she suffered at a young age. By the time she was 18, she had lost 7 people in her family to death. It was a difficult family life, with losses to drug overdose and murder. She then shared that the stories of the lost son and lost sheep in Luke 15 particularly connected with her. She has wandered out into her own life of rebellion and then experienced the grace and forgiveness of Christ, welcoming her back into the fold. She manages her grief now through the acceptance of God’s plan and free-will theodicy,

Kettering College.

⁶⁷ Student #2, "Suffering Reflection Paper," Student Submission, 2025, Humanities and Social Sciences, Kettering College.

⁶⁸ Student #3, "Suffering Reflection Paper," Student Submission, 2025, Humanities and Social Sciences, Kettering College.

recognizing that God has not caused all of the loss that she has suffered.⁶⁹

Following an experience of betrayal from childhood friends, a debilitating disease, one student shares the relief that she discovered in accepting the apology of the friends that had betrayed her and extending forgiveness to them, and more importantly, to herself. She saw herself in the forgiveness that was demonstrated by Jesus at the last supper for the one who would betray him, and Jesus' call to love our neighbors and pray for those who persecute us. "I forgive Peanut and Lele for what they did to me, but most importantly, I forgive myself. I will always remember the way that Jesus provided, and I cannot wait to see where He directs me next."⁷⁰

A heart-wrenching story of a little four-year-old girl chasing her dog down the railroad tracks, only to have the dog die in her arms, left this student devastated with shame and guilt because she had let the dog out of the yard to begin with. She turned away from God because of the guilt and shame that she felt, and couldn't understand how such horrible things could have happened to her at a young age. When she reflects on it now, she can see the cosmic conflict that is all around and find solace in no longer placing the blame upon herself.⁷¹

Evidence of Sanctification – The relief from the suffering within our Influence

One student experienced feelings of depression and loneliness in a couple of false starts

⁶⁹ Student #4, "Suffering Reflection Paper," Student Submission, 2025, Humanities and Social Sciences, Kettering College.

⁷⁰ Student #5, "Suffering Reflection Paper," Student Submission, 2025, Humanities and Social Sciences, Kettering College.

⁷¹ Student #6, "Suffering Reflection Paper," Student Submission, 2025, Humanities and Social Sciences, Kettering College.

in college. The student expressed that her family's poor engagement with her mental health was the cause of the suffering (within the influence of those around us). Her spiritual identity was transformed through the recognition of God's interactive presence within her story.

“Even in times of loneliness, he is there for us. Having no one to talk to made me feel isolated. The majority of what I was going through was caused by my family, who are incredibly supportive. I know that they care, but it was the way that they went about it. ‘God is not a distant observer of human suffering but is deeply involved in it. He shares in the pain and anguish of His creation, and His presence offers comfort to those who are hurting’ (Rice, 2014, p. 156). I always knew that God was there, but during this moment in time during my life, I experienced God being my healer.”⁷²

It is not uncommon for us to have students choose the soul-shaping theodicy for the way they interpret their suffering narratives.⁷³ One student who lost both of her grandmothers to cancer holds on to the strengthening effect that going through that suffering has had on her.⁷⁴ Another student, through a story of the loss of a step-father who loved and accepted her, found the purpose that she had been seeking in the calling that she believes God placed upon her life to be a nurse. She was able to reshape her view from a God that punishes us to one who loves us and calls us forward to the purposes that he has for our future.

“In conclusion, my suffering story changed my life in an extremely positive way, and I believe that God has his hand in everything that we do in our life, and it is very important to look at everything in such a way that it shows positivity rather than looking at it as punishment. Losing my dad was the hardest, most heartbreaking thing that I have gone through in my entire life. Although I did not blame God, I wanted to know what he had in store for me going forward. The loss of my dad showed me my life's purpose, a purpose that

⁷² Student #7, "Suffering Reflection Paper," Student Submission, 2025, Humanities and Social Sciences, Kettering College.

⁷³ This is also supported by the research around trauma recovery, through which we can see and let students know that those who go through the experience of trauma often come through it with more strength, resilience, and a stronger sense of meaning and purpose. Stromberg, *Trauma-Informed Pedagogy*, 24.

⁷⁴ Student #8, "Suffering Reflection Paper," Student Submission, 2025, Humanities and Social Sciences, Kettering College.

I had been searching for.”⁷⁵

Both of these students who chose the soul-shaping theodicy found ways in which their suffering could be redeemed and used to give them strength and purpose in the present.

A third student who chose soul-shaping did so out of a desperation to survive the suffering of losing her mother to a drug overdose. She expresses her initial interpretation of theodicy as raging against God. After growing and gaining the strength that she needed to carry on, she believes that soul-shaping gives her a way to survive the pain. She connected with the cry of Jesus on the cross, feeling abandoned by God in the same way that she felt at the loss of her mother.

“...the Gospel of Luke has provided me with a deeper sense of connection to Jesus’ own experiences with pain and loss. While I may never fully understand why suffering happens, I have come to believe that it does not mean God is absent. Instead, suffering can shape us, teach us, and ultimately draw us closer to God’s presence and purpose.”⁷⁶

We also have students within our classrooms who do not believe in God; they also process their own suffering story using the same resources and reflect on the ways they have survived and might manage their future suffering. One student found her purpose to survive her struggles of mental illness because of the people in her life. She said that she was not willing to consider suicide “...in my eyes, suicide isn’t the end of pain. It is simply the passing of your own pain to those who loved you, even when you couldn’t love yourself. Because of this, and because of my commitment to those I love and my ability to affect their happiness, I never considered

⁷⁵ Student #9, "Suffering Reflection Paper," Student Submission, 2025, Humanities and Social Sciences, Kettering College.

⁷⁶ Student #10, "Suffering Reflection Paper," Student Submission, 2025, Humanities and Social Sciences, Kettering College.

this an option.” While she read the bible as literature, she also found meaning in the stories as a way to press on for the sake of others.⁷⁷

Another student, after watching her mother be ravaged by a disease and never giving up on God, who eventually restored her to health, concluded that the greater good is the truth that she holds on to. She protested against God while her mom was suffering, but after her recovery was able to see the ability of God to sustain her for the greater good.⁷⁸

The suffering of isolation through deployment to Japan caused another student to respond to God in protest and complaint for the suffering that she was experiencing. She also identified with the suffering of Christ and the abandonment that he felt on the cross after reading through the gospels. She turned her experience of suffering into one of growth and strengthening, and hopes to follow this within the next stretch of suffering that comes along. If Jesus, who is so good, can suffer and grow from it, so can she.⁷⁹

Evidence of Glorification – The hope in the relief of suffering beyond our control

Our student body is made up of 15% Adventist students. This student found reaffirmation in her Adventist faith and the hope of the resurrection through the reflection on the loss of her grandmother.

“The fact that my grandma passed away is a result of the world we live in, a world that is filled with sin, death, and pain. As a Seventh Day Adventist, I believe that my grandmother is

⁷⁷ Student #11, "Suffering Reflection Paper," Student Submission, 2025, Humanities and Social Sciences, Kettering College.

⁷⁸ Student #12, "Suffering Reflection Paper," Student Submission, 2025, Humanities and Social Sciences, Kettering College.

⁷⁹ Student #13, "Suffering Reflection Paper," Student Submission, 2025, Humanities and Social Sciences, Kettering College.

now at rest, returned to the earth, and that I will be able to see her again after the second coming of Christ. There is comfort in the belief that we will see a loved one again, and in the fact that God is involved with our lives, even if he allows a world with sin.”⁸⁰

We also see the faith of our students in the phase of glorification through those who believe in God’s perfect plan. While it is a coping mechanism for the suffering that they are currently going through, it also points them toward the ways in which God will see them through and restore loved ones that they have lost. One student shares the devastation her mother went through losing a most beloved sister. This family holds to the comfort that God has a plan for these times of suffering that he will see them through and restore their loved ones to them.⁸¹

The ravages of sin and suffering are very visceral and real for another student who suffered from sexual abuse at the hands of a “friend.” The shame that she felt was devastating and separated her from God, because she had been convinced that the abuse was something that she wanted, even if it meant eternal condemnation. Through the suffering narrative process, she came to see the cosmic conflict that is taking place in the world around her and that neither God nor she was to blame for the suffering that she had to endure. She was able to identify with the pain of rejection that Jesus went through and hold on to the hope with Paul that these current sufferings are nothing compared with the glory that is to come.⁸²

⁸⁰ Student #14, "Suffering Reflection Paper," Student Submission, 2025, Humanities and Social Sciences, Kettering College.

⁸¹ Student #15, "Suffering Reflection Paper," Student Submission, 2025, Humanities and Social Sciences, Kettering College.

⁸² Student #16, "Suffering Reflection Paper," Student Submission, 2025, Humanities and Social Sciences, Kettering College.

Conclusion

One of the resources that we have students read in a later class is from Samuel Wells entitled “Does God Heal?”⁸³ Wells also suggests a three-phase approach to salvation. The first phase is that of forgiveness. Forgiveness is already accomplished and available for all. The final phase is eternal life. Wells also believes that this has already been given by God, and yet we are waiting for it to be realized fully. The middle phase is that of healing. Wells explains that this may or may not happen, depending on circumstances, and it may happen in a way we do not expect. These students are 16 of the students from Spring 2025. Their suffering spiritual autobiographies reveal different types of suffering relief and healing that they have experienced. Not all were healed as they would have hoped, but they have all found reasons to survive and carry on into a calling to health care. As faculty, we have been given the opportunity to shape the minds, hearts, and lives of these students in their pursuit of healing others. We are truly preparing them to become agents of sanctification, and I believe that the suffering narratives are helping to prepare them to do just that.

⁸³ Samuel Wells, "Does God Heal?," in *Be Not Afraid : Facing Fear with Faith* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Brazos, 2011).

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