

HOPE
for the Hurting
BIBLE STUDY
TONY EVANS

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About the Author

Dr. Tony Evans is the founder and senior pastor of Oak Cliff Bible Fellowship in Dallas, founder and president of The Urban Alternative, former chaplain of the NBA's Dallas Mavericks, and author of over 100 books, booklets, and Bible studies. The first African American to earn a doctorate of theology from Dallas Theological Seminary, he has been named one of the twelve most effective preachers in the English-speaking world by Baylor University. Dr. Evans holds the honor of writing and publishing the first full-Bible commentary and study Bible by an African American.

His radio broadcast, The Alternative with Dr. Tony Evans, can be heard on more than 1,400 US outlets daily and in more than 130 countries.

Dr. Evans launched the Tony Evans Training Center in 2017, an online learning platform providing quality seminary-style courses for a fraction of the cost to any person in any place. The goal is to increase Bible literacy not only in lay people but also in those Christian leaders who cannot afford nor find the time for formal ongoing education.

Dr. Tony Evans was married to his late wife, Lois, for nearly fifty years. They are the proud parents of four, grandparents of thirteen and great-grandparents of three.

For more information, visit TonyEvans.org.

How to Get the Most from this Study

This Bible study book includes six weeks of content for group and personal study.

GROUP SESSIONS

Regardless of what day of the week your group meets, each week of content begins with the group session. Each group session uses the following format to facilitate meaningful interaction among group members, with God’s Word, and with the teaching of Dr. Evans.

START. This page includes questions to get the conversation started and to introduce the video teaching.

WATCH. This page includes key points from Dr. Evans’s teaching, along with blanks for taking notes as participants watch the video.

DISCUSS. This page includes questions and statements that guide the group to respond to Dr. Evans’s video teaching and to relevant Bible passages.

PERSONAL STUDY

Each week provides three days of Bible study and learning activities for individual engagement between group sessions: “Hit the Streets” and two Bible studies.

HIT THE STREETS. This section highlights practical steps for taking the week’s teaching and putting it into practice.

BIBLE STUDIES. These personal studies revisit stories, Scriptures, and themes introduced in the videos in order to understand and apply them on a personal level.

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Tips for Leading a Small Group

Follow these guidelines to prepare for each group session.

PRAYERFULLY PREPARE

REVIEW. Review the weekly material and group questions ahead of time.

PRAY. Be intentional about praying for each person in the group.

Ask the Holy Spirit to work through you and the group discussion as you point to Jesus each week through God's Word.

MINIMIZE DISTRACTIONS

Create a comfortable environment. If group members are uncomfortable, they'll be distracted and therefore not engaged in the group experience. Plan ahead by considering details like seating, temperature, lighting, food and drink, surrounding noise, and general cleanliness.

At best, thoughtfulness and hospitality show guests and group members they're welcome and valued in whatever environment you choose to gather. At worst, people may never notice your effort, but they're also not distracted. Do everything in your ability to help people focus on what's most important: connecting with God, with the Bible, and with one another.

INCLUDE OTHERS

Your goal is to foster a community in which people are welcome just as they are but encouraged to grow spiritually. Always be aware of opportunities to include any people who visit the group and to invite new people to join your group.

An inexpensive way to make first-time guests feel welcome or to invite someone to get involved is to give them their own copies of this Bible-study book.

ENCOURAGE DISCUSSION

A good small-group experience has the following characteristics.

EVERYONE PARTICIPATES. Encourage everyone to ask questions, share responses, or read aloud.

NO ONE DOMINATES—NOT EVEN THE LEADER. Be sure that your time speaking as a leader takes up less than half of your time together as a group. Politely guide discussion if anyone dominates.

NOBODY IS RUSHED THROUGH QUESTIONS. Don't feel that a moment of silence is a bad thing. People often need time to think about their responses to questions they've just heard or to gain courage to share what God is stirring in their hearts.

INPUT IS AFFIRMED AND FOLLOWED UP. Make sure you point out something true or helpful in a response. Don't just move on. Build community with follow-up questions, asking how other people have experienced similar things or how a truth has shaped their understanding of God and the Scripture you're studying. People are less likely to speak up if they fear that you don't actually want to hear their answers or that you're looking for only a certain answer.

GOD AND HIS WORD ARE CENTRAL. Opinions and experiences can be helpful, but God has given us the truth. Trust God's Word to be the authority and God's Spirit to work in people's lives. You can't change anyone, but God can. Continually point people to the Word and to active steps of faith.

KEEP CONNECTING

Think of ways to connect with group members during the week.

Participation during the group session is always improved when members spend time connecting with one another outside the group sessions. The more people are comfortable with and involved in one another's lives, the more they'll look forward to being together. When people move beyond being friendly to truly being friends who form a community, they come to each session eager to engage instead of merely attending.

Encourage group members with thoughts, commitments, or questions from the session by connecting through emails, texts and social media.

When possible, build deeper friendships by planning or spontaneously inviting group members to join you outside your regularly scheduled group time for meals, fun activities, or projects around your home, church or community.

Week 1

COMING TO THE COMFORTER

Start

Welcome to Group Session 1.

What shapes a person's view of his or her painful experiences in life?

How do upbringing, past experiences, expectations, and coping skills impact the healing process when painful scenarios pop up?

Imagine a Christmas tree with stacks of presents placed at its base. Examine each carefully wrapped present in your mind. You're likely not visualizing identically shaped and sized gifts because Christmas presents come in all shapes and sizes. Similarly, each person's pain, trauma, and triggers are unique to them. Your scars, scares, and challenges are unique to you. There is not a one-size-fits-all pain moment for all people. Neither is there a one-size-fits-all solution to the hurts we feel.

Everyone experiences pain differently. Some of us face it well. Some of us try to deny it. Others, even, succumb to its crushing weight, which only leads to more pain through the compounding consequences of additional poor personal choices. Unfortunately, many people miss the opportunities for growth that pain provides. The purpose of this Bible study is to help you face life's difficulties with dignity and come out stronger because of it.

Invite someone to pray, then watch the video teaching.

Coming to the Comforter

Watch

Follow along as you watch video Session 1.

Video sessions available at lifeway.com/hopeforthehurting

Discuss

Use the following questions to discuss the video teaching.

The passage we're going to discuss is an anchor passage for trying times.

Read this passage together and then discuss the following questions.

For we do not want you to be unaware, brethren, of our affliction which came to us in Asia, that we were burdened excessively, beyond our strength, so that we despaired even of life; indeed, we had the sentence of death within ourselves so that we would not trust in ourselves, but in God who raises the dead; who delivered us from so great a peril of death, and will deliver us, He on whom we have set our hope. And He will yet deliver us, you also joining in helping us through your prayers, so that thanks may be given by many persons on our behalf for the favor bestowed on us through the prayers of many.

2 CORINTHIANS 1:8-11

Have you ever heard the statement "God won't give you more than you can handle"? Why is this statement untrue and unhelpful?

We've all heard the statement that God won't put more on you than you can bear. No one wants to be the bearer of bad news, but this statement is untrue at best and unhelpful at worst. God often puts more on us than we can bear when he's trying to strip us of ourselves and lead us to depend on Him in our weakness. If we never experienced more than we could bear, there would never be a reason to depend on God.

Have you experienced a time when God put more on you than you felt you could bear? If so, what did you learn through that experience?

Coming to the Comforter

What are some reasons you believe God may allow us to struggle beyond what we feel individually able to solve or fix?

In the video, Dr. Evans talks about the season in the Evans home where they lost eight family members to death over a period of just two years. This season of crushing was more than they could bear on their own. He talks about how there are times in our lives when God is the only One remaining with strength to lean on because all human strength is gone. This is actually a good place to be—depending on the goodness of God and the faithfulness of others. In this passage, Paul described that the ultimate goal of our affliction is thankfulness for the favor that would be brought to us through the prayers of many.

What does it look like in practical terms to set your hope on God in the midst of a hopeless situation?

What power comes when people come together to pray in one accord? When have you felt the benefits of personal prayer?

Share a time you came to know God's favor personally when you faced a hopeless scenario, and what was the result?

PRAYER

Lord, in times of trials and difficulties, it is easy to lose hope and lose heart. But You desire to produce new life and new gratitude through these difficult times. Help us not to give in to the despondency and despair, but rather help us to look to You with a spirit of expectation that Your favor will see us through this painful season. In Jesus' name, amen.

Hit the Streets

PUSHING THROUGH

When a person exercises, he or she will often look to something outside of themselves to distract them during the pain. This distraction helps them to keep going and push through. God doesn't want to just distract you in the pains of life, but He wants to comfort you. That is even better. His comfort provides a way for you to push through the challenges of hurt and loss, while also maximizing the opportunity for personal growth and development.

Below are three key passages, and a space for you to write a personal summary of each, to keep your eyes on when you are going through a painful season.

These things I have spoken to you, so that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world.

JOHN 16:33

Personal Summary:

Coming to the Comforter

For just as the sufferings of Christ are ours in abundance,
so also our comfort is abundant through Christ.

2 CORINTHIANS 1:5

Personal Summary:

Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked
I shall return there. The LORD gave and the LORD has
taken away. Blessed be the name of the LORD.

JOB 1:21

Personal Summary:

Bible Study 1

SEEKING COMFORT

If you live in Texas or the surrounding states, you will remember—like me—the terrible freeze we all went through in the early part of 2021. I had COVID-19 at the time with moderate symptoms. So, not only was I struggling to heal from the virus, I was also cold. The whole house was cold. The power grid had been hit so hard that many thousands lost power. In fact, nearly 200 people lost their lives during this horrific winter storm.

In order to keep warm, I had to use a number of blankets and comforters. My point might be obvious but in order for the comforters to do what they were created to do—keep me warm during the coldest winter I had ever known—I had to go grab them and cover myself with them. If the comforters were stacked in the closet or in a basket, they would do no good. I had to make the decision to go get the comforter and shelter under them in order to benefit from them.

Similarly, God offers us comfort in our difficulties and pain. But He doesn't force His comfort on us. We need to seek Him out and grab hold of His truths and presence to gain access to His comfort. In other words, God's comfort is abundant but not automatic. We must participate with Him in the process of pain in order to realize the powerful nature of His comfort. The Scriptures teach that God is a God of comfort.

Read the following verses and pull out the phrases on “comfort” in each one. Write them below the verse:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,
the Father of mercies and God of all comfort.

2 CORINTHIANS 1:3

Comfort phrase:

Coming to the Comforter

Who comforts us in all our affliction so that we will be able to comfort those who are in any affliction with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.

2 CORINTHIANS 1:4

Comfort phrase:

For just as the sufferings of Christ are ours in abundance, so also our comfort is abundant through Christ.

2 CORINTHIANS 1:5

Comfort phrase:

God's comfort comes to us in the midst of suffering and affliction. If it were a hot summer day in Texas, I wouldn't have needed the comforters I rested beneath during that disastrous winter storm. I needed the comforters because of the cold. Similarly, we experience God's comfort when we choose to look to Him for comfort instead of to deny the difficulties we are facing.

In what ways does contemporary Christianity and even secular psychology teach people to deny the difficulties they are facing and put on a facade?

What eventually happens when a person denies or ignores the pain in his or her life?

Acknowledge the pain in your heart doesn't make you less spiritual. You aren't more mature because you put your chin up and pretend that life's blows don't really get to you. Stuffing your emotions so that you can tell others you are "blessed by the Best" only creates a ticking time bomb in your spirit which will eventually blow. We heal from pain by acknowledging it.

Hope for the Hurting

No one ever healed by ignoring a wound rather than treating it. Wounds heal when they are washed, cleansed, treated, and kept clean. Similarly, pain in our hearts needs to be acknowledged and addressed in order to heal.

Identify one painful area in your life which you may have been glossing over. Why have you chosen not to face it?

Why is acknowledging your pain necessary for receiving the comfort God has supplied?

Why do we fool ourselves into thinking denying or hiding our pain will be more comforting than admitting it?

How can we encourage one other to be more transparent about our wounds so that we can receive the healing and comfort we need?

The Greek word for “comforter” used in the verses we examined on the previous page shares a root word with a term Jesus used to describe the Holy Spirit in John 14:16. Here Jesus said “I will ask the Father, and He will give you another *Helper*, so that He may be with you forever.”

Thus, in every affliction, trouble, hurt, pain, distress, or difficulty that you may be facing, there is a Comforter. There is a blanket of blessing, if you will choose to grab it. Now, it’s possible to spend so much time in a cold room complaining about the cold all the while not choosing to pull the comforter up over you. The comforter is there. You’re just more focused on the temperature in the room.

Your focus affects what your experience.

Coming to the Comforter

Read Romans 8:28-29.

And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters..

ROMANS 8:28-29

What perspective do these verses give you concerning God's purpose for your pain?

Describe some characteristics of a person "conformed to the image of" Jesus Christ.

How might that relationship with Jesus shape his or her experience with pain?

Pray about your pain, troubles and triggers. Do you view them through the lens of God's purpose? Are you actively seeking to be conformed to the image of Jesus Christ more so than desiring a life of ease?

PRAYER

Spend some time in prayer asking God to align your heart and spirit with His purposes, and to enable you to be more authentic and aware of the personal traumas of your life that you need to acknowledge, address, and look to God for comfort in.

Bible Study 2
LIFE LOOPS

The promises of God's Word have never been a guarantee from pain and trouble. Rather they are promises to experience God in pain. Oftentimes, God does manifest His victory on our behalf by removing the challenge or bringing us through, but not until He has developed us through it. Being able to develop through our pain is a mark of spiritual maturity. It proves that when we are pressed we find comfort from our Comforter.

List some qualities of spiritual and emotional maturity..

Which of those qualities do you feel would be difficult to possess and maintain during painful times?

What is one quality of emotional and spiritual maturity you would like to strengthen in order to sustain you during hard times in life?

In fact, God will often allow us to remain in a painful situation until we are ready to be delivered from it. He does this in order that we might strengthen our spiritual maturity. When you or I don't learn the lessons we need to learn, it positions us in a life loop—a cyclical pattern of loss and pain. Until you break the cycle and seek God's grace for healing and growth, you'll be caught in a loop of self-doubt and limitation. Life loops are those times when we find ourselves being forced to learn the same lessons over and over again.

Coming to the Comforter

How can we find purpose in our pain and move beyond the life loop?

Understanding the purpose behind your pain requires accepting the sovereignty of God. God's sovereignty is His total control over all of life. It means that nothing happens to you unless it passes through His fingers first. In every circumstance, either God has caused it or He has allowed it. If He caused or allowed it, He has a reason for it. When you grasp that core spiritual truth, you can move past the "why me" or the "I wish I would have" or "If only I" or "If only He" thoughts and begin to acknowledge the fallout of the pain you are facing. You can shift your thinking in order to look for the important lesson at hand.

Is there an important life lesson that you feel may have been put on a "loop" in your life so that you are facing multiple opportunities to learn it?

Why do you feel this lesson is on a "loop"?

I often compare the life loop lessons we experience to taking a test in school. If you fail a test in school, the teacher will often ask you to retake it because the goal of teaching is to help you understand information and the only way the teacher knows that you understand the information is through passing the test. Similarly, God gives us tests in our own lives that center on aspects of wisdom, spiritual growth, and maturity. When we fail to learn these lessons, we'll be asked to take the same test again. Life loops happen to us in order to awaken our hearts to the critical need for spiritual growth.

Hope for the Hurting

When have you learned a tough lesson after many attempts at trying to learn it? Describe how you felt once you broke through and applied life's wisdom to your lesson.

One of the key traits people learn when going through a life lesson is humility. As you are probably aware, humility is a critical component of wisdom and essential for the Christian life. God intentionally opposes the proud (Ps. 138:6; Prov. 3:34; 29:23). That means, when you operate from position of pride or self-service, God will not get behind what you are doing. His Word tells us time and time again that pride comes from sin.

Pain removes pride from our hearts because it reveals our humanity. It reveals our need to honor and love others, and to not think more highly of ourselves than we ought. Pain topples the towers of pride erected in our souls. And while this may be unpleasant to go through, the outcomes, if you cooperate with the lessons of pain and loss, will be worth it. You'll find yourself living with greater levels of peace, contentment, and joy when you live a life devoid of pride.

Read the following verses and summarize their key points in your own words.

For the LORD is exalted,
Yet He looks after the lowly,
But He knows the haughty from afar.

PSALM 138:6

Summary:

"Behold, I am against you, arrogant one,"
Declares the Lord GOD of armies,
"For your day has come,
The time when I will punish you."

JEREMIAH 50:31

Coming to the Comforter

Summary:

The Lord GOD has sworn by Himself, the LORD God of armies has declared: "I loathe the arrogance of Jacob, And detest his citadels; Therefore I will give up the city and all it contains."

AMOS 6:8

Summary:

For the LORD of armies will have a day of reckoning
Against everyone who is arrogant and haughty,
And against everyone who is lifted up,
That he may be brought low.

ISAIAH 2:12

Summary:

What do these verses communicate as a whole?

PRAYER

Pray and ask God to reveal to you what lessons you need to learn from the painful life loops you have experienced. Let God know you want to break free from the cyclical lessons you've faced. Ask Him to place people and situations into your life to help you learn and apply what you need to in order to develop spiritual maturity at a deeper level than you've previously experienced.