

Personal Growth Assignment: Suffering

We were born into a world that God cursed when humanity first sinned against him in the garden of Eden (Gen. 3:17). As a result, we groan. We groan because life hurts badly—sometimes with unspeakable sorrows. But, unlike those who do not know Jesus, we groan with hope. We groan while we wait for the ultimate day of redemption when “the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption” (Rom. 8:21). We groan as our hearts ache for the day when Jesus will make “all things new” (Rev. 21:5). Until then, suffering is guaranteed.

These assignments help us learn not only to accept suffering but to embrace it as one of the primary tools that God uses to work out our sanctification in Christ and to appreciate God’s loving presence and care throughout our lives.

In this post, I’ll offer both 6-session and 12-session sample plans rooted in biblical truth to help you walk alongside someone walking through a season of suffering—or to use for yourself. But first, let’s revisit the purpose of each element of a Personal Growth Assignment (PGA), and how to use them most effectively. (If you missed my introductory post explaining the “why” behind PGAs, I encourage you to [read that first](#).)

Three Core Elements of Effective PGAs

Each PGA should typically include the following elements:

1. Engage with the Word

This is the most essential component. Our aim is to minister to the heart by nurturing a habit of meditation on Scripture. God’s Word—His revealed mind in written form—is the Spirit’s primary instrument to renew the mind and transform the heart (1 Cor. 2:11–16; 2 Cor. 3:18). Encourage Scripture memorization to keep God’s truth close throughout the day. When assigning a passage for meditation, offer a few journal prompts to help the person engage meaningfully with the text. For example:

- What does this passage reveal about God? Which of His attributes or works speak most directly to your current struggle?
- What does this passage reveal about you? Are there weaknesses, sins, or trials that hinder a trusting response to God?
- What affections of your heart are challenged by this passage? Are there desires the Spirit wants to change in you?
- What thoughts or behaviors need confession, and where do you need God’s help for change?

2. Invite More Counsel

The second element introduces trusted biblical voices through carefully chosen resources—books, articles, sermons, podcasts, or videos. In a noisy world, it’s vital to point people toward biblically sound and soul-stabilizing content (Titus 2:1–6; Prov. 27:17). When you “bring another counselor into the room,” ask the person to interact with the resource actively—highlighting meaningful sentences and journaling personal takeaways. Links to recommended resources appear at the end of this post.

3. Put Feet to Faith

Spiritual growth isn't just about learning; it's about living. While renewing the mind is foundational, it must lead to changed actions (James 1:22–25). This third element invites the person to take a specific step of obedience based on what they're learning.

That step might be:

- Developing a new habit,
- Writing a prayer based on a Scripture meditation,
- Or having a hard but needed conversation.

Instead of assigning this yourself, consider asking: “*What is one way you can apply this truth to your life this week?*”

You may choose to meet weekly or biweekly. Remember, counseling is simply intentional discipleship shaped by someone's specific needs and context. Keeping that in mind will help you avoid a one-size-fits-all approach.

Sample Plans for Hope in Suffering

6-Session Plan

#	Engage with the Word	Memorize	Invite More Counsel	Put Feet to Faith
1	Read Psalm 46 slowly at least four times this week. Journal about the character and promises of Psalm 46:1 God, threats to peace, and life situations that match your own.		Read <i>The Most Encouraging Promise in the Bible</i> by Armand Tiffe. Highlight meaningful sentences. Be ready to share 5–10 highlights.	Begin a “My God Is...” list in your journal, based on Psalm 46 (e.g., “My God is a refuge,” “My God is ever-present”).
2	1 Peter 1	1 Peter 1:6-9 (one verse at a time, building from week to week)	Read <i>Help! I Can't Handle All These Trials</i> by Joel James (Intro & Ch. 1).	Complete one or two of the Practical Application Projects at the back of the booklet.
3	1 Peter 2	1 Peter 1:6-9	Read <i>Help! I Can't Handle All These Trials</i> , Ch. 2	Complete one or two of the Practical Application Projects at the back of the booklet.
4	1 Peter 3	1 Peter 1:6-9	Read <i>Help! I Can't Handle All These Trials</i> , Ch. 3	Complete one or two of the Practical Application Projects at the back of the booklet.
5	1 Peter 4	1 Peter 1:6-9	Read <i>Help! I Can't Handle All These Trials</i> , Ch. 4	Complete one or two of the Practical Application Projects at the back of the booklet.
6	1 Peter 5	1 Peter 1:6-9	Reflect on the lessons learned from 1 Peter.	Create a list of biblical truths that will help to

Engage with the Word Memorize

Invite More Counsel

Put Feet to Faith

strengthen you in times of suffering, both now and in the future. Write a prayer of trust in the Lord in your suffering.

Optional Continuation: 6 Additional Sessions

Engage with the Word

Memorize

Invite More Counsel

Put Feet to Faith

Read James, one chapter per week.
Journal about the promises of God you
7– can hold on to in times of suffering, as
12 well as the benefits of suffering to
grow your faith and sanctify your
heart.

James 1:2-4

Read 5 chapters per
week from *Hope: Living
Confidently in God* by
John Crotts.

Reflect on the
questions at the
end of each
chapter.

FOR COUNSELING TEENS: Check out the [Lifeline Mini-Books for Teens](#)

SMALL GROUP SUGGESTION: Work through 1 Peter and James. Also use *Trusting God* by Jerry Bridges, one chapter at a time, using the group discussion guide in the back.

Final Thoughts

These plans are flexible and meant to get you started. As you gain more experience in discipleship counseling, you'll grow in the ability to tailor assignments based on each person's unique context and needs. But for now, use these suggestions as a helpful framework.

Mentioned Resources:

- *The Most Encouraging Promise in the Bible* – Armand Tiffe
- *Help! I Can't Handle All these Trials* – Joel James
- *Hope: Living Confidently in God* (31-day devotional) – John Crotts
- *Trusting God* – Jerry Bridges
- *Lifeline Mini-Books for Teens* – Shepherd Press

More recommended resources for suffering and trials may be found [here](#).

The above resources are available from many online bookstores, such as [Biblical Counseling Books](#), [WTSBooks](#), and others. If you are in Canada, shop at [Reformed Book Services](#).

[Download a PDF of this plan.](#)