

COLLOQUY

A CONVERSATION WITH GUTENBERG COLLEGE



Fall 2022

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Welcome



In September, Gutenberg College welcomed German tutor **Kathleen Shorack Petty** to its

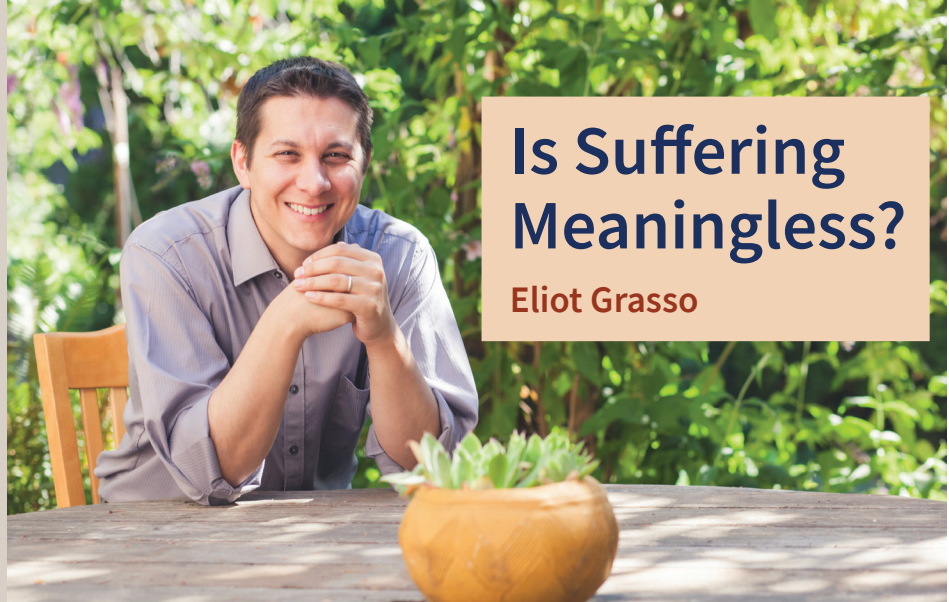
faculty. She has taught at elementary schools (both in the United States and Germany), high schools, and college; and she has been a workshop leader for world language teachers. She is passionate about teaching the German language and culture and introducing students to a global perspective.



Tutor **Naomi Rinehold** is not new to Gutenberg College, but she joins the faculty full time this fall, teaching Greek, tutoring Western Civ and Great Conversation classes, and serving as the student services administrator.



We are excited to welcome a new freshman class: **Wesley Colman, Weston Snider, Nickolas Eskew** (back); **Evangelina Rogers, Joanna Gilliland** (front). Welcome class of 2026!



Is Suffering Meaningless?

Eliot Grasso

Is suffering meaningless? The answer to this question matters because it impacts how we think about our own suffering and the suffering of those around us. Suffering is undeniably a part of life. Everyone suffers to various degrees and in many different ways.

But what are we to make of all this suffering, all this pain? How will we understand what we and others around us are going through? Is there purpose, point, or meaning here? Or is suffering just a drain, a tragedy, something to eradicate as quickly and thoroughly as possible?

This is a difficult topic because it is so personal for so many, but I will contrast two answers to the question. I will look at the typical secularist's answer, and I will contrast that with what I believe to be the biblical answer.

Suffering from the World's Perspective

If you ask a secularist whether suffering is meaningless, you may find the answer to be, "Yes, suffering is meaningless." This is a common perspective of the world at large. In the nineteenth century, the English philosopher and father of utilitarianism John Stuart Mill used pain and pleasure as the fundamental criteria for ethics. That is, the way you decide what is morally right in life is to weigh the pain against the pleasure for the greatest number of people. From Mill's perspective, the right thing is to do whatever creates pleasure for the greatest number of people. This perspective assumes that pain is a bad thing and that pain and suffering are things to avoid. They are to be avoided because suffering is meaningless—it brings people into unfortunate situations that would be better for them to do without.

So many of man's innovations in the last few years have been aimed at reducing suffering and making life easier in various domains. Great strides have been made in medical technology, for example, to help heal patients, prolong their lives, and aid families in need. I, for one, am very glad for these advancements. But the assumption that rides beneath these advances is that because pain and suffering are bad, all pain and suffering must be eliminated. There is, additionally, the perspective that suffering *can* be eliminated. We just have to keep working on the problem.

Suffering from the Bible's Perspective

The Bible is full of suffering people. From Jesus to the apostles to the prophets, there is great, great suffering. Early Christians suffered tremendously in Rome because of their convictions. Was all this suffering really necessary? If so, does it mean anything?

If you ask the Bible whether suffering is meaningless, you find a resounding "No." Suffering is hard, suffering is painful, suffering is taxing, suffering is difficult, but it is anything but meaningless. From a biblical worldview, suffering is filled with meaning.

If suffering is meaningful, then what are its possible meanings? I will offer two biblical meanings of suffering here and offer some broad context for the nature of suffering from a biblical perspective.

First, suffering is designed to demonstrate God's glory to man. In the gospel of John, chapter 9, Jesus passes by a man born blind. Blindness is an affliction; no one desires it. The one who is blind *suffers* from blindness. John tells it this way:

As [Jesus] passed by, he saw a man blind from birth. And his disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" Jesus answered, "It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him. [John 9:1-3. All quotations from ESV.]

The disciples' question could be rephrased like this: "Jesus, what is the meaning of this man's suffering? Is it punishment for some wrongdoing?" Jesus' answer is this: "The meaning of this suffering is not punishment for wrongdoing. The meaning of this suffering is to provide an opportunity for God's works to be observed among us." The man suffers from blindness so that God's goodness and mercy can be shown when Jesus heals the man. When Jesus spits in the mud and puts the mud on the man's eyes, the man washes in the Pool of Siloam and comes back able to see. Jesus alleviates the man's suffering, thus demonstrating the glory of God.

Second, suffering is designed to transform the individual human being. Paul points out in Romans 5:3-5 that one of the points of suffering is to produce hope in the believer. Paul writes:

Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us."

Suffering is painful. It makes us keenly aware that something is not right with the world. Suffering can drive us inward to search for answers and for meaning. Here, Paul is saying that believers can rejoice in their suffering when they endure it because enduring suffering produces (*dokime*) character, a word that can also be translated as "proof" or "testing." This proof/testing/character produces hope (*elpis*), which can be translated as "expectation." Our suffering, Paul says, is something in the midst of which we can rejoice because that suffering brings us to a place of greater expectation of the good that God will do. Suffering draws our attention to complete reliance upon God and our hopeful expectation of His forthcoming good works. Though suffering is difficult, we have much to look forward to from God. The meaning of suffering, then, is to produce hope in God.

The anti-corollary would be this: If I do not suffer, then I am satisfied with the world as I encounter it. I am feeling great. I have no need to trust in a good, transcendent God. If I have no suffering, my life couldn't be better. If that is my thinking, then I hope in nothing.

It is important to remember, however, that the suffering God designs for us is not designed to destroy us. I myself struggle to rejoice in my suffering. I do not find it easy to be thankful amidst difficult circumstances. It is easy to shake one's fist at God when pain and difficulties come and to reject the meaning of suffering as Paul outlines it in Romans. But Paul had more to say about suffering to the church at Corinth. In 2 Corinthians 4:8-10, he writes:

We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies.

Our suffering is inevitable. Things get difficult. We are afflicted with suffering in tremendous ways, but our suffering does not destroy us. Then Paul says something interesting in verse 10: "always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies." This echoes what Jesus says in Matthew 16:24-25:

If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.

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Farewell



In August, Gutenberg College said goodbye to tutor **Chris Alderman**. He and his family moved north to be closer to family. Chris served Gutenberg well for several years, and all of us at Gutenberg will miss him. We wish him and his family well as they start the next chapter of their lives.



In October, **Beth Sheehan** resigned from Gutenberg's board of governors to concentrate on her work for the Eugene Mission where she is the Director of Philanthropy. Beth has not only served on Gutenberg's board since January 2019, but she has volunteered countless hours before and since organizing, preparing, and donating amazing food for a wide variety of Gutenberg events, including Summer Institutes and Education Conferences—the last two years with help from women in the Culinary Program at the Eugene Mission. We at Gutenberg are so thankful for both Beth's help and the help of the Eugene Mission. Beth says she wants to remain an "enthusiastic friend" of Gutenberg, including offering hospitality support for events into the future. Thank you, Beth!

Is Suffering Meaningless?

Continued from page 3

It sounds like Jesus is suggesting that sacrifice—a form of suffering—is integral to following him. When Paul talks about carrying in the body the death of Jesus, it strikes me that to be a believer is to come to grips with the *inevitable* suffering that following Jesus entails. The one who follows Jesus will have room in his thinking for the idea that suffering has meaning.

Now, the sort of suffering Jesus has in mind here seems to be of a particular sort: the suffering directly caused by following Him—the suffering endured because of one's faith. I am not saying that all suffering is of this sort. We may suffer from a stubbed toe, a forgotten birthday, or food poisoning—none of which deals directly with the life of faith. But I would propose that instances of suffering (be they large or small) unrelated to persecution still may give us cause for hope.

One of the most significant things that the Bible has to say about our suffering is that it is temporary. Whether one is experiencing persecution for one's faith or whether one is suffering from pain related to other things, the Bible wants believers to know that suffering is temporary. John writes in Revelation 21:3-5:

And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away."

And he who was seated on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new." Also he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true."

There will come a time when God wipes away the tear from every eye. He will assuage our grieving, take away our pain and suffering, and make all things new.

In Psalm 119:75, David writes "I know, O Lord, that your laws are righteous, and in faithfulness you have afflicted me." God is well aware of the suffering we endure—suffering that is either caused directly by Him, as in David's situation, or that He allows, as in the case of Job.

Though suffering is hard, it is certainly not meaningless. If we spend time considering the meaning of our suffering, we can consider what Paul and David are saying about it. Suffering may be inevitable, but it is designed for our good, for our betterment, to make us hopeful.

And I would add that suffering creates so many opportunities for us to care for one another. In practicing acts of mercy, charity, and service, the goodness of God may continuously be demonstrated on the earth.



Eliot Grasso is the vice president and a tutor at Gutenberg College. He holds an M.A. in ethnomusicology from the Irish World Academy of Music and Dance and a Ph.D. in musicology from the University of Oregon.

The Gutenberg Podcast: Coming This Fall!



Host Gil Greco

Gutenberg alumni **Gil Greco** and **Andrew Weber** join forces to create a series of conversations intended to bring the complex world of ideas to a broader audience. The guests are Gutenberg tutors who explore the Great Books from a Christian perspective, recognizing their complexity in the light of competing views.



Chris Swanson



Producer Andrew Weber

The first podcast will feature Gutenberg President **Dr. Chris Swanson** discussing "Communication and Persuasion." Other scheduled topics include "Ancient Epic," "Ancient Polytheism and Biblical Judaism," "Homer and the Story of the Cyclops," and "Greek Theater."

The new podcast will be published on our website and on most major podcast distribution sites. Check Gutenberg's website for air date: gutenberg.edu/podcast. We hope you can tune in to the conversation!



gutenberg.edu/podcast

YOUNG PHILOSOPHERS DISCUSS POP CULTURE

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BREATH of the WILD

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IN **STRANGER THINGS**
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FREE WILL
IN MARVEL'S **LOKI**

LOVE
IN **POP MUSIC**

MAY 11
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An online discussion for high school students: gutenberg.edu/yp

Life at Gutenberg College

Students who enter Gutenberg's doors join a class and a community where they are seen and heard. It is an intensely connecting and affirming experience at a time when they are looking for friendships, a sense of self, and making their way in the world. This community aspect is built out of shared experience: four years in the same classes with the same classmates, shared meals, chores, group study, hanging out, and talking—lots of talking. There is friction, but it polishes the rough edges. The faculty assign homework, but they also become friends and mentors. Students who enter Gutenberg's doors leave with an education that has prepared them to think about life and pursue many different career paths, but more importantly, they often leave with lifelong friends. If you are considering studying at Gutenberg, we invite you to visit and experience it for yourself.

Visit gutenberg.edu/preview.



The Loft



Friday Afternoon Tea in the Dining Room



Irish Music & Dancing

Every month or so, residents and students gather for traditional Irish music and dancing. The musicians are faculty, alumni, and students. (Pictured at left: sophomore Samuel Tardibono, tutors Charley Dewberry and Eliot Grasso, and alumna Trisha Yeager.) These events started a number of years ago when Eliot Grasso offered up a night of traditional Irish fiddle. The students loved it and wanted more. So Eliot drew in more musicians, students took on the role of “callers,” and a new tradition was born. It's a great time for stomping, hooting, and having a lot of fun.



Quarterly House Work Day



Discussion in the Backyard

Senior Trip

In September before school started, the seniors organized an adventure to Sunriver, Oregon. Connor Clark, the elected ‘Czar’ of the trip, pitched this vision to his class earlier in the year so that they could reconnect, have a good time, and make some memories. Everyone in the class was excited about this trip, and it was a weekend to remember. They stayed together in the same rental house but not on the same team. Ryanna Eyre had devised a scavenger hunt of epic scale that took the two teams across several miles of resort and lava fields in search of personalized clues. They also hiked up Black Butte one day for an incredible view and enjoyed hearty meals prepared by chefs Will Dowdy and Dane Miller.



The Library



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Make a difference?

Have confidence?

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Be a friend?

Have faith?

Live well?

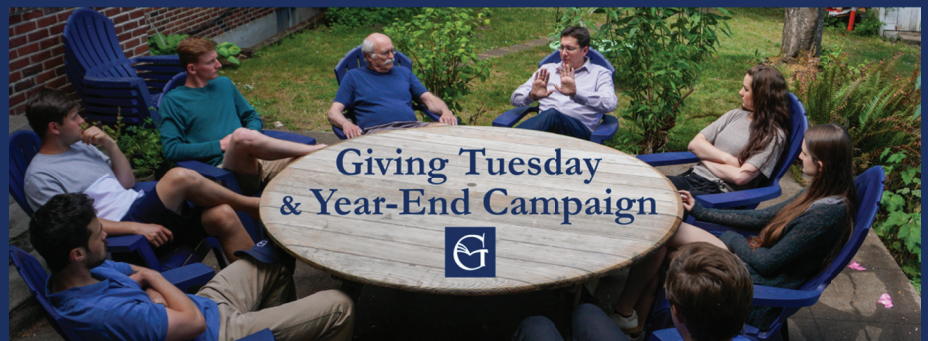
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NOVEMBER 29

We're kicking off our year-end campaign on #GivingTuesday, November 29! Gutenberg impacts the lives of students year after year because of the generosity of friends and supporters. These gifts make it possible to pursue our unique educational mission—a mission desperately needed in our world. #GivingTuesday is an opportunity for you to join us in the pursuit of that mission. Your generosity makes a difference. Thank you for supporting Gutenberg College!

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