

Why Does God Allow Suffering?

Often times, when people are dealing with setbacks and struggles, they have a tendency to blame God. They might ask, “Why is God letting this happening to me?” (or the world) They might attribute what we are facing right now as the hand of God and possibly His judgment. So how do we answer that? Today I would like to talk a little about God and suffering.

Not too long ago, I presented some lessons dealing with this topic, but in light of present circumstances, I believe it is beneficial to remind ourselves of some of these things, as we might be wondering about them ourselves OR dealing with friends and family who might be struggling with this subject.

I begin by noting I do not have all the answers. Nor does anyone else. And in seeking answers to such questions, there is no perfect answer – among the reasons being that God does not speak directly to us today, as He did in times past (Hebrews 1:1-4, 1 Corinthians 13:11-12, etc.). But I believe that in God’s word we can find some understanding and guidance as we deal with whatever is happening. His word is profitable to make us complete (2 Timothy 3:16-17) and able to give us all things that pertain to life and godliness (2 Peter 1:3). And that is what we want to notice in our lessons today.

I. Who is God?

- a. To begin to answer the question of God and suffering, we first need to understand who God is. So let us take a few moments and notice the God of the Bible – some qualities associated with Him.
- b. **He is all powerful** – omnipotent. A continual theme related to God in the Bible is His awesome power. Whenever you hear the word, “almighty” it is a reference to His power. Jesus said, “With God all things are possible”. (Mark 10:27)
Jeremiah 32:17 says, *‘Ah, Lord God! Behold, You have made the heavens and the earth by Your great power and outstretched arm. There is nothing too hard for You.*
Job 42:2 says, *“I know that You can do everything, And that no purpose of Yours can be withheld from You.*
So many other verses could be added to these that declare God is all powerful. He created this world and all that is in it. Establish the Bible (through prophecies, proving the resurrection, etc. – ALL manifestations of Almighty God), and you know He is totally in control. That is why we can have confidence in Him (1 John 4:4 – He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world.)
- c. **He is everywhere** – aka, omnipresent – there is no place you go to hide from God – Psalm 139:7-11. Jeremiah 23:23-24 says, *“Am I a God near at hand,” says the Lord, “And not a God afar off? Can anyone hide himself in secret places, So I shall not see him?” says the Lord; “Do I not fill heaven and earth?” says the Lord.*
Being everywhere means we cannot hide from Him and He sees everything. That can be a comfort to one who trusts in Him and it ought to strike fear in anyone who does not (Amos 9:1-4, Hebrews 10:31)
- d. **He is all knowing (wise)** – aka, omniscient. He knows everything about everything. He knows your innermost thoughts and motives. He knows our hearts. He knows what is best in every circumstance. He knows what the outcome is going to be and can act accordingly. His word (the Bible) is testament of that. Romans 11:33-36 speaks of *the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out.*
1 Corinthians 2:16 notes, *“Who has known the mind of the LORD that he may instruct Him?”* This is in a context addressing the wisdom of God being greater than ours. It also comes with a warning when we think we can improve upon His will.
In this, we can have confidence that He knows what He is doing.

- e. **He is loving** – we must not forget this when we consider the character of God. He cares about us. He does understand. His rule, while righteous is tempered with love, mercy, patience and grace. He is also good in its highest sense.
 1 Peter 5:7, cast all your cares on Him for He cares for you
 Romans 5:8, He demonstrates His love in that Christ died for us.
 Ephesians 2:4-6 – by His grace (and mercy) we are saved.
 2 Corinthians 1:3-4 describes Him as, “The Father of mercies and God of all comfort who comforts us in all our tribulation...
 Romans 2:4 speaks of His goodness, forbearance and longsuffering as it leads you to repentance. This is the God who I serve. I believe He is the ONE true God.
 This is a quality that sets Him apart from so many deities of other religions and throughout history. It is the reason we have hope.
 When we consider whatever is going on in the world, we need to remember these things and seek answers to whatever enigmas we might have with that in mind.
- f. **He is sovereign** – which means He has the right to rule however He chooses. Whether we like it or not, if He is God and Creator, we are His creation. He has the right to make the rules and to expect us to follow them AND hold us accountable. And He deserves our respect and honor, especially when we consider how He does care, what He has done and what He offers us.
- g. These are a few qualities of God to consider when we look at what is going on around us at any time.

II. Why does God allow suffering?

- a. More directly, Is God the cause of what is happening now? (Because that is typically what one means when such a question is asked). This evening, I want to give some of my thoughts about that and how to deal with suffering. But I will tell you right now, I DON'T KNOW!
 But before we give specific consideration, I want to consider in more general terms some thoughts about God and suffering.
- b. Thoughts about God and suffering –
- i. **This discussion does not prove or disprove God.** But it does address who God is and His character, which is why we began a discussion on suffering with His character. When we establish His character, we must approach whatever we are dealing with in light of that character. **If God is good, suffering doesn't change that!**
 - ii. **Is God the cause of all suffering?**
NO! Much, if not most, suffering is the result of sinful behavior (sometimes directly, or at other times indirectly). How many live miserable lives because of ungodly decisions, or because of the ungodly actions of others?
 Crime, much poverty, addictions, immoral behaviors and attitudes (such as lust, greed, hatred, lack of self-control, etc.), materialism, civil unrest, the violation of natural laws (such as gravity, sanitation laws, etc.) and so many other things that produce horrible results, are the product of man's ungodly decisions. And then when disaster strikes, rather than blaming the one who is at fault, many blame God!
Free-will is another factor – God chose to create man with the ability to choose his destiny and decide how to live. You can find that even in the Garden of Eden where instructions were given to Adam and Eve. Part of the reason the world is where it is at today because of the choices Adam and Eve made.
 We must consider the fact that man CHOOSES, and very often, poorly and there are consequences. Sometimes to himself, sometimes to others (whether innocent or not – e.g. a drunk driver injures another), and sometimes it's the product of society that has chosen how to address moral issues and even the subject of God, or just decisions that have a lasting effect on society. All of these have consequences.

- iii. ***Put the blame where it belongs*** – on Satan! This world is his dominion that is filled with so much corruption and ungodliness, etc. He is “the god of this age” blinds the minds of so many (2 Corinthians 4:4). He is the father of lies (John 8:44). The world lies under the sway of the wicked one (1 John 5:19) It is his servants who bring about much suffering in the world. He is the roaring lion seeking to devour you – 1 Peter 5:8, the warning given IMMEDIATELY after telling us that God cares about us. Realize that Satan doesn’t care about what is best for you. He wants you to be miserable and bitter. He wants you to blame God. This is not to be flippant about real suffering, but it would do us well to put the blame where it belongs, and honest examination can see this to be the case.
- iv. ***Be careful in questioning God*** – Whenever we are dealing with suffering, struggles and disappointments, EVEN IF we don’t understand them, we must not forget this! Isaiah 55:8-9, we don’t know God’s plans, thoughts or ways. They are higher than ours. Romans 9:19-24, warns us to be careful when we start questioning God or accusing Him. Years ago in a sermon dealing with difficult subjects such as this, I heard a man made the following statement: ***“There are questions I cannot answer, but there are also answers that I cannot question.”***
NOTE: Are we consistent? How many want to blame God for the bad that happens, but take personal credit for the good? Consider Job 2:10.
- v. ***However, consider that God ALLOWS suffering.*** Based on His character as previously discussed, whatever happens, He allows it. And this is where the real struggle comes in. And that is why we must consider the points we have just addressed when we think about this. Again, we may not understand why or how much is appropriate, but that really is not ours to determine. But WHY does He allow it? And can good come from it? Stay tuned for our next lesson.

It is my hope that in this we can see that God really does care about us even as we deal with suffering and struggles in this life. In fact, He designed this world and our existence in such a way that good can come from trials and tribulations. In our next lesson we will focus on that.

In the meantime, let me encourage you to let whatever you face in life draw you closer to Him. And if there is some way I can help you with that, let me know. Think about it.

Why Does God Allow Suffering? (2)

In our lesson this morning we began a discussion of God and suffering. I am convinced many today are thinking about this, especially in our society where God is not honored as much as He once was. Many use sufferings as a crutch to reject God. These lessons are designed to show us that suffering is not the product of a sadistic God who enjoys torturing people. In fact we read in God's word, *Say to them: 'As I live,' says the Lord God, 'I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn, turn from your evil ways! For why should you die, O house of Israel?'* (Ezekiel 33:11). We also find in 2 Peter 3:9 that God is longsuffering, not willing that any should perish – He desire that we repent! But He will not force that upon us.

This morning we discussed a little about the character of God – He is all powerful, everywhere, all knowing (and wise), a loving and gracious God, and sovereign – but with care for us. NEXT we addressed some thoughts about God and suffering: 1) Suffering does not prove whether or not God exists, but it does deal with His character; 2) We noted God is NOT the cause of all suffering – much of it is the product of sinful decisions in varying forms, 3) We reminded ourselves to focus the blame where it belongs – on Satan and following Him; 4) WE briefly addressed the need to be careful before we question God; and finally, 5) We noted in all of this that God ALLOWS suffering, but when we consider who He is, that does not make Him cruel and uncaring. TONIGHT, we want to focus on that by asking can good come from suffering. I will also make some comments about what we are dealing with right now. So let's get started with this part of our lesson.

III. Can good come from suffering? Yes, in many ways.

- a. ***It can cause good in the long run*** - enduring trials can make you a better person in the long run (James 1:2-4, Romans 5:1-5, etc.).

We see this in life in many places.

Discipline is not pleasant when administered (Hebrews 12:5-11), but it can make you a better person – provided they learn from it.

A doctor hurts you when he cuts on you to remove that tumor or repair a heart, but what is the end result?

Training in athletics is often unpleasant – involving sacrifices and sometimes pain as you learn your limits and how to increase your limits. Resistance makes a task harder, but in the end you are stronger, faster, and better prepared to handle it. That was Paul's point in 1 Corinthians 9:24-27 where he compared our life to a race – not a sprint, but a marathon. Run to win, and “discipline” yourself so that you can finish. Even Paul did it.

Can good come out of bad situations? Consider Joseph – all he endured. “You meant it for evil, but God meant it for good”. (Genesis 50:19-21)

Consider Paul's thorn in the flesh- 2 Corinthians 12:7-10

We don't know what the outcome will be on the other end of some trouble, etc. In many instances we have some control, at least where we will land.

- b. ***It can lead to repentance*** – Sometimes, suffering causes us to reevaluate our lives and what is most important. For many, it can cause them to return to God.

Consider the prodigal son – Luke 15:15-20.

The longsuffering of God is designed to lead us to repentance – 2 Peter 3:9. We wonder why this world continues in its ungodly state. It is because God desires man to repent. Every day is one more opportunity!

- c. ***It can cause the Christian to trust God.*** Times of trial are when our faith is tested. If we resolve to trust God, we come out better at the other end.

1 Peter 4:19, *Let those who suffer according to the will of God commit their souls to Him in doing good, as to a faithful Creator.*

2 Timothy 1:12, Paul confidence as he is suffering for the cause of Christ. He is not ashamed because he know what is waiting for him on the other side.

- d. ***It can humble us*** – helping us realize that there are things bigger than we are. Sometimes it takes failures, rebukes and suffering to “bring someone down a notch”
Consider Peter’s denial of Jesus (Matthew 26:33-35) – He overconfidently rebuked Jesus saying even if all others denied Him, he never would. We know he did and when he realized what he had done, he went out and wept bitterly (Matthew 27:75). But we also know Jesus forgave and restored him, likely the point of John 21:15ff where 3 times Jesus asks Peter if he loved Him and then charges him to “feed my sheep”. While not perfect, Acts records how Peter (and the others) was a changed man. Sufferings can humble us realize that we do need God. Recall James 4:13-15, we ought to say, “if the Lord wills...”
- e. ***It can make this world less appealing.*** The Christian understands that “this world is not my home”. That is why Peter BEGS his audience “as sojourners and pilgrims” to live honorably and abstain from fleshly lusts (1 Peter 2:11). Paul said we are foreigners on earth by saying, “Our citizenship is in heaven” (Philippians 3:20).
Troubles and trials might make us long for heaven where our treasure is (Matthew 6:19-21). The descriptions of heaven and its contents are described as better. Revelation 22:3 – there shall be no more curse (possibly a reference to the curse that began after the fall of Adam). Revelation 21:3-4 speaks of there being no tears as God will wipe them all away, no death, sorrow, crying, pain, etc.
- f. ***It can bring out the good in (some) people*** – suffering often cause people to be compassionate. Many are willing to sacrifice for the good of others. WE are seeing and hearing of many acts of kindness during these times. Sadly, we are also seeing some acting selfishly and exploiting others. Suffering is one of those tests that reveals who you really are. When we see others suffering, or we are suffering together – who do we think about?
- g. ***It can also possibly cause the unbeliever to turn to God*** – especially as they observe our example. You never know what it will take to soften a hardened heart. Sometimes calamity and suffering leads to greater bitterness in unbelievers, but at other times it is that which leads them to surrender to God. That is why we must be the best examples we can be right now. 1 Peter 4:12-16, 2:11-12.
- h. One final observation. I will say, imagine a world where God did intervene every time (or more likely, those times we think He should intervene). Would we really appreciate sacrifice and love? Would we repent? Would we be humble? Would we look to heaven as being a better place?
The point is, suffering has a purpose.

IV. **God has given us the tools we need to deal with suffering.**

- a. Christians approach the subject of suffering different than those without God.
- b. ***We have our brethren*** -they are there to comfort and strengthen us – Hebrews 12:12, 1 Thessalonians 5:14; Galatians 6:2 – we are here for each other.
- c. ***We have the avenue of prayer*** – we can turn to God. James 5:13, 16; 1 Peter 5:7 – we can cast our cares on God.
- d. ***We have hope of something better*** as we addressed the last two weeks.
- e. ***We have His promises*** – 1 Corinthians 10:13 – no temptation, God will provide the way of escape. Hebrews 13:5-6, “I will never leave you nor forsake you...”
- f. ***We have the comfort knowing that God does understand.*** Even our Lord said, “Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden... (Matthew 11:28-30)
He sent Jesus to suffering a grueling death after a life of being accepted by many and rejected and persecuted by others.

- g. ***We have His word*** – given to build us up. As our Creator, in times of trouble, can you think of a better place to turn than to the one who rules all things? Acts 20:32, as Paul spoke to the Ephesian elders he commended them *“to the word of His grace which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified.”*
- h. ***We have the attitudes that will help us deal with whatever we are facing*** - hope, optimism, patience, self-control, peace and of course love (1 Corinthians 13:13).
- i. NOTE: Many of these things are encouraged even by the worldly. Think about this pandemic. Everyone is encouraging upbeat attitudes and optimism, thinking about others instead of yourself, comforting them and helping them when you can, etc.
Why? Because they are the things needed to get through this. But I ask, WHY are these the right thing to do? Can you think of a source that makes them meaningful? As Christians, we have a greater reason behind what we do – we know this is what God wants us to do. He created this world and He does know what is best, even in times of suffering!

V. **So, is God the cause of this pandemic?** Is it a judgment of God? Is this a warning that the end is near? My answer is, I do not know.

a. I believe He is able should He choose to do so.

I believe God can work providentially to accomplish His will. But understand the nature of providence – it is God working through natural means (not miraculous). That is why, we cannot definitively say “God did this”.

And I believe He WILL accomplish His will – PERIOD! He is greater than he who is in the world (1 John 4:4). IF God is for us, who can be against us? Romans 8:31

All things work together for good – according to His purpose (Romans 8:28)

b. But, I also believe this could simply be the product of this world taking its course. This world is not what it was intended to be when God first created it and placed Adam and Eve in the garden. Just prior to Romans 8 speaking of God accomplishing His will, we find the creation being subjected to futility, and even speaks of it groaning because of the way it is. (Romans 8:19-22). Much of its difficulties is the product of a sin cursed world, a world that has turned its back on God, even to the point of denying His very existence.

c. Much of our suffering is the product of man’s bad behavior and poor choices. **How did this virus begin?** It is highly likely it started with the consumption of a bat in China that was purchased from an open market that sold all sorts of exotic animals to be consumed. Conditions were likely very unsanitary – something likely the doing of man. Somehow the virus in that animal mutated to affect humans as we are witnessing today.

Naturalists teach us that we are nothing but the product of natural evolution and chance. The atheist/naturalist says all we have is this life and when we die we are like the animals – that’s it. And then we wonder why so many live so selfishly – thinking only about themselves.

d. Could it be God sending a message to us? Whether God has had a hand in this or He is simply letting “nature take its course”, I don’t know. But we can act as if He is. We OUGHT to get a message from it! Use this as a time to examine yourself as to whether you are in the faith (2 Corinthians 13:5). A time to ensure that we are ready to stand before Him in judgment (2 Corinthians 5:9-10).

NOTE: These are NOT perfect answers, but they show we don’t always know the intended end of why something is happening, but it can make us better. So what is the solution? ATTITUDE! It is about how you deal with whatever brings suffering in your life. You can use the trials and troubles of this life to draw you closer to God or further away from Him. Let us choose wisely as Joshua did – Joshua 24:15. Think about it.