

POD Teaching Session 7 Module B

Why would a good God allow suffering?

Learning Objectives:

- What Job teaches us about God and suffering?
- Why hasn't God made His purposes for evil and suffering clearer?
- Typical responses to evil and suffering.
- Why would God allow suffering? A look at four perspectives.
- Becoming a good comfort giver.

More people point to the problem of evil and suffering as their reason for not believing in God than any other – **it is not merely a problem, it is the** _____ John Stott says: “The fact of suffering undoubtedly constitutes the single greatest challenge to the Christian faith, and it has been in every generation. Sufferings degree and distribution appear to be entirely random and therefore unfair. Sensitive spirits ask if it can possibly be reconciled with God’s justice and love.”

Unfortunately, most churches have failed to teach people to think biblically about the realities of evil and suffering. As a result we have been left vulnerable to the lies of the enemy which challenge God’s goodness. Suffering will come; we owe it to God, ourselves, and those around us to prepare for it.



1 Peter 3:15 but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence; NASB95

Discuss: _____

➤ What Job teaches us about God and suffering:

When I need a point-of-view adjustment, I read the last five chapters of Job. At the end of the book, the focus shifts from Job’s suffering to God’s _____. I never read those chapters without feeling God has been put in his proper place and I’ve been put in mine. (Randy Alcorn)

Job 10:2-3. “Show me why You (God) contend with me. Does it seem good to You that You should oppress, that You should despise the work of Your hands, and to look favorably on the schemes of the wicked?”

Then God shows up!



Job 40:1-4. Then the Lord said to Job, “Will the fault finder contend with the Almighty? Let him who reproves God answer it.” Then Job answered the Lord and said, “behold I am insignificant; what can I reply to Thee? I lay my hand on my mouth.

- Insisting on knowing the unknowable dooms us to frustration and resentment to God.
- God never faults Job for being finite, only for failing to recognize that he has no right to pass judgment on the wisdom and goodness of an infinite Creator.
- God never tells Job to shut his mouth; but after seeing God’s greatness Job realizes he must.
- Job’s humble response to God’s self-disclosure gives us a timeless model for approaching the problem of evil.
- God grew angry at Job’s friends for dispensing their smug, orderly theological answers in the face of their friend’s suffering (all except Elihu, best to study his comments in Chapters 32 thru 36).
- God’s response to Job satisfies Job and therefore should satisfy us. Job 38-41. **Rather than explain why, He reveals who:** _____. When God shows himself to Job, lesser answers become unnecessary.
- Transformation begins when we stop asking “why me” and start asking “who are you God?”

➤ Why Hasn’t God made His purposes for evil and suffering clearer?

- Our inability to understand all God’s purposes in evil and suffering should not surprise us. We are not omnipresent, omniscient, and omnipotent.
- What we call the problem of evil is often the problem of our finite and fallen understanding.
- God’s explanations probably wouldn’t be as helpful or comforting as we imagine.
- If God offered constant explanations, our lives would not be free or normal, and would not allow for faith or trust.
- God has revealed just enough of Himself to give us reasons for faith, but not enough to make faith unnecessary. “We walk by faith not by sight” (2 Cor.5:7)

It is dangerous, even foolish, to pretend that we have a complete answer as to why God allows suffering. The reasons are many and complex. It’s just as wrong that we should _____ that we should understand. When Job realized that he had no right to demand an answer from God, he said, “Therefore I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know” (Job 42:3)

However God has given some answers, we can know in part. Though we may not fully understand, why we face a certain problem, we can know how to deal with the situation and respond in a way that pleases the Lord. (Remember Jachin (IN HIS COUNSEL) and Boaz (BY HIS STRENGTH) from session 4)

**See Resource Guide: “Why does God allow evil?” (A great short summary)
“When trouble comes, what kind is it? How to Respond?”**



What you may need most right now is not a four point outline on why you are suffering or even what to do about it. What you may need most is a hug, a listening ear, or some who will just sit with you in silence..... Sometime along the way, however, you will want and need the truths of God’s Word to comfort you and help you to see and understand your plight from God’s perspective.

➤ **Peoples four typical responses to the problem of evil and suffering:**

1. Some people choose to deny God’s existence.
2. Some believe God exists but want nothing to do with Him.
3. Others believe in a kindly God who loves us but has lost control.
4. Still others cling tenaciously to a belief in an all-wise, all-powerful, loving God who somehow uses evil and suffering for good.

➤ **Why would a Good God Allow Suffering? Four Perspectives:**

Many excerpts taken directly from “Why would a Good God Allow Suffering?” RBC ministries Discovery Series (See the resource guide for a link that will allow you to download a PDF and or order up to 25 free copies)

If you are like me you long, in some way, to put together an answer to this puzzling issue of suffering. I believe that God has given us enough pieces of the puzzle to help us trust Him even when we don’t have all the information. As we study the Bible we can see the basic answers are that our good God allows pain and suffering in our world: one, to alert us to the problem of sin, two, to direct us to respond to Him in faith, and hope, three, to shape us to be more like Christ, and fourth, to unite us so that we will help each other. So, let’s look at this issue from those four perspectives.

- 1. To Alert Us:** As much as we may abhor pain, we have to admit that it often serves a good purpose. It _____ us when something goes wrong. The cause of the misery, rather than the agony itself, is the real problem. Pain is merely a symptom, a siren or bell that sounds when a part of the body is endangered or under attack. Pain is God’s way to alert us that: something is wrong with the (a) world, (b) God’s creatures and or (c) us.

“God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pains; it is His megaphone to rouse a deaf world.” C.C. Lewis

- (a) **Something’s wrong with the _____:**

“The Bible traces the entrance of suffering and evil into the world to a grand but terrible quality of human beings ---- freedom.” Philip Yancey

The great gift of human freedom that God has given to us, the ability to choose, carries with it the risk of making wrong choices. God could have created us to be like the cute battery-operated dolls that say “I love you” when hugged. But God had other plans. He took a _____ to create beings with a free will who could do the unthinkable --- rebel against their creator.

Discuss: _____



For love to be authentic there must be freedom to choose to accept or reject.

With the fall of man sin entered the world with all its devastating effects on the nature of human beings, but sin also brought about immediate and continual judgment from God. Genesis 3 relates how physical and spiritual death became a part of human existence. **Disease, disaster, and corruption are symptoms of a deeper problem; the human race has rebelled against the Creator.** Every sorrow, grief and agony are vivid reminders of our human predicament. The world is not the way God created it to be.



Therefore, suffering is the direct result of sin's entrance into the world. Pain alerts us that a spiritual disease is wracking our planet. Many times our troubles may be merely the side-effects of living in a fallen world, through no direct fault of our own.

(b) **Something's wrong with God's _____**: (other people and Satan's army of fallen angels)

Suffering can be caused by people. As free (sin-infected) creatures, people have made and will continue to make many bad choices in life. These free will bad choices often affect other people. The hurt that others inflict upon us may be due to _____ on their part. Or we may be the target of _____ because of our faith in Christ.

Suffering can be caused by Satan and demons. Job's story is a vivid example as Satan was allowed to take away Job's possessions, his family, and his health. God allowed this for a greater good and purpose. Job's life is a living testimonial to the trustworthiness of God. Job illustrated that a person can trust God and maintain integrity even when life falls apart (for whatever reason) because God is worth trusting. In the end, Job learned that even though he didn't understand what God was up to, he had plenty of reason to believe God was not being unjust, cruel, sadistic, or unfair by allowing his life to be ripped apart (Job 42).

Paul was given a thorn in his flesh, "a messenger from Satan" (2 Cor. 12:17). Paul prayed many times to be freed from the problem, but God did not give him what he asked for. Instead, the Lord helped him to see how this difficulty could serve a good purpose. It made Paul humbly dependent on the Lord and put him a position to experience His grace. (vs. 8-10)

(c) **Something is wrong with _____**: Too often when something goes wrong in our lives we immediately jump to the conclusion that God is whipping us because of some sin we've committed. That is not necessarily true. Most of Job's friends mistakenly thought that he was suffering because of sin in his life (Job 4:7-8; 8:1-6; 22:4-5; 36:17). Jesus told his disciples that the condition of a blind man was not the result of the man's personal sin or that of his parents (Jn. 9-1-3).

With these cautions in mind we need to deal with the hard truth that some suffering does come as the direct **consequence of our sin** --- either as corrective _____ from God for those He loves, or _____ action by God upon rebels in His universe.

Most of us can understand the principle that whom God loves He disciplines. We would expect a loving Father to correct us and call us to renew our obedience to Him.

Hebrews 12:5-6 and you have forgotten the exhortation which is addressed to you as sons, **“MY SON, DO NOT REGARD LIGHTLY THE DISCIPLINE OF THE LORD, NOR FAINT WHEN YOU ARE REPROVED BY HIM; FOR THOSE WHOM THE LORD LOVES HE DISCIPLINES, AND HE SCOURGES EVERY SON WHOM HE RECEIVES.” Hebrews 12:9-10**

Furthermore, we had earthly fathers to discipline us, and we respected them; shall we not much rather be subject to the Father of spirits, and live? For they disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them, but He *disciplines us* for *our good*, so that we may share His holiness. NASB95



Jesus also said to the Church in Laodica: **Revelation 3:19** **“Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline; therefore be zealous and repent.** NASB95

King David knew the **tough love** of the Lord, after his sin with Bathsheba. **Psalm 32:3-4** When I kept silent about my sin, my body wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night Your hand was heavy upon me; My vitality was drained away as with the fever heat of summer. Selah. NASB95

Punitive Action (God’s Judgment): God also acts to deal with stubborn unbelievers who persist in doing evil. A person who has not received God’s gift of salvation can expect to receive God’s wrath at a future day of judgment (White Throne) and faces the danger of harsh judgment now if God so chooses.

God brought the flood, he destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah, He sent the plagues on the Egyptians, He commanded Israel to completely destroy the pagans who inhabited the promise land, He struck down the arrogant King Herod of New Testament times. And at the future day of judgment, God will deal out perfect justice to all those who reject His love and rule (2 Peter 2:4-9).

In the here and now, however, we face inequities. For His all-wise reasons, God has chosen to _____ His perfect justice. When we struggle with the reality that wicked people are literally “getting away with murder” and all sorts of immorality, we need to remember that “the Lord is ... longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance”. (2 Peter 3:9)

Therefore, the first part of the answer, then, to the problem of suffering is that God uses it to alert us to serious problems. Pain sounds the alarm that indicates something is wrong with the world, with humanity at large, and with you and me. But as we will see in the next section, God not only signals the problems, He also uses troubles to encourage us to find solutions – In Him!

2. To Direct Us: In this section we will see that God uses troubles to direct us.

When a person turns away from God, suffering often gets the blame. But strangely, suffering also gets the credit when people describe what redirected their lives, helped them see life more clearly, and caused their relationship with God to grow closer. **How can similar circumstances have such radically different effects on people?** The reason lives deep within the people, not the events.

All of us have experienced devastating life events (or you will). As a result did you begin to lose your faith? If so how did it make you feel better or worse? Describe a personal experience: _____

Have you wrestled with God over a trouble, but did not turn away from Him? Describe. _____

2 Corinthians 1:8-9 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; NASB95



There is a principle: Suffering can produce healthy _____ on God.

2 Corinthians 12:9-10, “My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness.”Paul says: “ Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ’s sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong”. NASB95

Suffering has a way of showing how limited and weak our own resources really are. It forces us to rethink priorities, values, goals, dreams, pleasures, the source of real strength, and our relationships with people and God. It has a way of directing our attention to spiritual realities --- **If** we don’t turn from God instead.

Suffering forces us to evaluate the direction of our lives. We can choose to despair by focusing on our present problems, or we can choose to hope by recognizing God’s long-range plan for us (remember Session 6 “Blessings (God’s Reward Criteria)” See also Rom.5:5; 8:18-28; Heb. 11) God has planned that only in the long-range view of eternity would our faithfulness during hardship be rewarded (Heb 11:39-40).

Pain forces us to look beyond our immediate circumstances. Suffering drives us to ask the big questions of “why am I here?” and “What’s the purpose of my life?” By pursuing those questions and finding the answers in the God of the bible, we will find the stability we need to endure even the worst that life can inflict because we know that this present life is not all there is.

The day Jesus hung and died on the Cross is now called GOOD FRIDAY: Why? _____



So when troubles strike and they will, remember this: God uses such situations to direct us to Him and to the long-range view of life. He calls for us to trust, to hope, and to wait in Him.

3. To Shape Us:

You have heard the term “No pain, No gain.” As we discussed in session 6 often times we will discipline ourselves or go in to strict training (diet, exercise, education and the like) which is sometimes painful all for the hope of gaining what we believe will meet our needs. So why do we do it? The gain is worth the pain. (Remember Session 6 “Blessings -- God’s Standards for Reward”)

But, what about the pain that we don’t choose? What about illness, disease, accidents, and emotional agony? What kind of gain can come from those? The Bible has much to say regarding that question:

Romans 5:3-4 And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope; NASB95 **Paul’s statement encourages us to celebrate the end product, not the painful process itself.**

James also wrote that we should rejoice in the end result of our troubles: James 1:2-4 Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the _____ of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. NASB95

When we combine the truths of these two passages, we can see how the good and praiseworthy products of suffering are patient perseverance, maturity of character, and hope. God can use the hardships of life to shape us to be more mature in the faith, godlier, and more Christlike.

Dr. M.R. De Haman wrote: “The greatest sermons I have ever heard have been not preached from pulpits but from sickbeds. The greatest, deepest truths of God’s word.... have been preached by those humble souls who have gone through the seminary of affliction and have learned experientially the deep things of God. The most cheerful people I have met, with few exceptions, have been those who had the least sunshine and the most pain and suffering in their lives. The most grateful people I have met were not those who traveled a pathway of roses all their lives, but those who were confined, because of circumstances, to their homes, often to their beds, and had learned to depend upon God as only such Christians know how to do.” (Remember Joni Eareckson Tada, Nick Vujicic, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zOzsjEmjiHs>)

How have you responded to the difficulties of life? _____

Have you become bitter or better? _____

Have you let it conform you into the image of God’s Son? _____



Romans 8:28 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. NASB95. This verse has often been misunderstood and perhaps misused, but its truth can bring a great deal of comfort.

We need to look at the context of Romans 8 to see what God is doing for us: The verse does not promise that we will understand all the events of life or that after a time of testing we will be blessed with good things in this life. But it does reassure us that God is working out His good plan through our lives. **He is shaping us and our circumstances to bring glory to Himself.**

Romans 8:28 is God’s guarantee that _____we love God, our lives can be used to achieve His purposes and further His kingdom. Notice that the verse is _____. What is or are the condition(s)? _____

But, you may ask, “how can God be in control when life seems so out of control?” Warren Wiersbe states that God “proves His sovereignty, **not** by intervening constantly (i.e. Omni-control/micro managing) and preventing these events, but by ruling and overruling them so that even tragedies end up accomplishing His ultimate purposes”.

The sovereign Lord of the universe is using all of life to develop our maturity and Christlikeness and to further His eternal plan. In order to accomplish those purposes, however, God wants to use us to help others, and He wants other people to help us.

4. To Unite Us: Pain and suffering seem to have a special ability to show us how much we need each other. In an _____ small group setting we have been drawn closer and we have been strengthened as we have faced the struggles of life together. God uses pain and suffering for the purpose of uniting us with other believers in Christ.

1. Suffering helps us to see our need of other believers.

1 Corinthians 12:26-27 And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; if *one* member is honored, all the members rejoice with it. Now you are Christ's body, and individually members of it.
Ephesians 4:16 from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love. NASB95

When we see how much believers have to offer us, then we will realize how much can be gained by reaching out for their help.

2. Suffering helps us to meet the needs of others as we allow Christ to live through us.

This is the "exchanged life" as we allow the life of Christ (the mind of Christ, Session4) to flow from our innermost being out through our soul and body. 2Cor. 1:3-4 says it well:



2 Corinthians 1:3-4 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, 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. NASB95

Even though the best comforters are those who have undergone similar situation and have grown spiritually stronger through them that does not mean that the rest of us are off the hook. All of us have a responsibility (faith opportunity) to do all we can to empathize, to try to understand, and to try to comfort.

Galatians 6:2 Bear one another's burdens, and thereby fulfill the law of Christ. NASB95

Romans 12:15 Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep. NASB95

In Summary: It's clear --- God made His children to be dependent on Him and one another and uses suffering to unify us. We have much to offer those in pain, and others have much to offer us as we endure troubles both in the physical and spiritual realms. It is God's plan that we "earnestly desire spiritual gifts" (1Cor 14:1). As we operate in those gifts we bring comfort and healing to His body the church.

He uses difficulty to direct us to Him, our only hope, as the war against our enemies is revealed. We learn that as we draw near to Him, He will draw near to us (James 4:8). As we learn to humbly submit to God and abide in His presence we can resist the devil who must flee from us as we put on the full armor of God (James 4:7, Eph 6:10-18)

He uses suffering to alert us to the problems of sin. The consequence of sin points to our need to be transformed in to His image. That's why He commanded us to "go and make disciples" of all nations. He promises to work all our afflictions to the good, that is, for those who love Him and are called according to His purpose (Rom 8:28).

He uses trials and tribulations to shape us. How we respond becomes the great testing of our faith in God. Do we trust Him? Is He faithful to fulfill all His promises to us? His promises should become an anchor to our soul (Heb. 6:19). They give us hope and the power to walk in the Spirit thus bringing glory to God, enjoyment of the fruit of the Spirit now and the hope of our rewards in heaven.



➤ **Becoming a good comfort giver:** Right now you may be overwhelmed by pain. At some point along the way, though, as you receive God’s comfort, you will be ready to give comfort (2 Cor:1 the best chapter on comfort in all of Scripture, IMHO).

Please refer to the resource guide articles: “Becoming a Good Comfort Giver”, “Why Christians Suffer” and “What does the Bible say about suffering?”

View the movie clip from C. S. Lewis’s life story called “Shadowlands”

REMEMBER: 1 Cor. 8:1 “Knowledge puffs up but love builds up”. Studying the Bible is important, but the goal is never knowledge for the sake of knowledge. Being a disciple of Jesus Christ means that we learn from Him, fellowship with Him, and obey everything He commands us. Love is the goal thru obedient holy living.

APPLICATION NEXT STEPS: As you review this session in your own personal quiet time, with your POD mates and others, ask yourself; What is God saying to me? and How am I going to respond? Begin now to look for opportunities to start sharing what you have learned with others. That is disciple making. Take advantage of the transformative power of prayer, journaling, writing out personal application/next steps, and memorizing key scriptures. Also, be sure to read the articles and one or more of the books mentioned in the resource guide at the end of each of the seven sessions.

KEY TAKE-AWAYS AND MY PERSONAL APPLICATION/NEXT STEPS:

Scripture I will commit to memorize from this session:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.