

WHY DO BAD THINGS HAPPEN TO GOOD PEOPLE?

"Americans (are) accused of having a weak theology of suffering!" (L. Gardner, Christian Standard, 1/19/'97) In a certain sense, this topic is important only a problem to those who believe in God! It does open up a lot of questions, some of which will be discussed in this presentation.

1. Why Did God Create Human Life?

The answer can only be found in Scripture. God knew there was great risk in creating human life, but judged the risk justifiable. Since God is absolutely sovereign, human life fills no personal need of God (Acts 17:24-25, Psl. 50:10-12). Since God is love, every act of God is motivated by love (agape)(1 John 4:7-8). From creation, God's desire was to give mankind eternal life (John 3:16).

By creating mankind as an object of His love, he wanted to draw out our capacity for love, i.e., the highest possible human attainment (Matt. 22:36-40). He also wanted to give to His creation the blessing of eternal relationship with Him (John 14:23, 1-3). To some degree, there is a parallel in the human decision to procreate. We do not have to produce children; we know there is risk; at our best, we do not have children to serve our needs, but rather to share with them the fellowship of family, and the blessing of the gift of life. So we take the risk!

2. Is God Really In Control?

Yes, in the ultimate. But in the day to day living of life, most of us are at times out of control, and some of us are most always out of control. Then, there is Satan and his angels. He is called the "god of this world" (2 Cor. 4:3-4). He is under God's control in the sense that God limits (as in the case of Job) what he is permitted to do (1 Cor. 10:13). He is also under control in the sense that he has already been sentenced by God to eternal destruction (Rev. 20:10).

3. Does Prayer Change Anything?

Prayer is a privilege to which we are invited (John 15:16-17, Luke 18:1)

Prayer is a personal engagement between God and His children.

Our prayers matter to God (James 5:16b, Rev. 5:8).

We pray, assuming that God is caring, unchanging and all powerful.

In our prayer, we have the mediation of Christ (1 Tim. 2:5) and the intercession of the Holy Spirit (Rom. 8:26-27). But, God has the veto power over our requests (1 John 5:14-15). Although we do not understand the factors that enter into God's judgment in answering our prayers, none the less, we trust Him (Job. 13:15). Even so, as in the case of Job, the Psalms, and often in the prophets, prayers of lament are acceptable (Hab. 1:1-3).

We do understand that suffering contributes to growth in faith (James 1:2-5), and also serves as discipline (Heb. 12:3-11). Prayer is a way in which God gives us inner peace (Phil 4:5-7). Prayer for others is such a vital gift that we can give, that it is a sin against God not to use this agency in behalf of others (1 Sam. 12:23).

4. Why is there sin and death in this world?

Adam/Eve brought sin and death into the world - Gen. 3, Rom. 5:12, 8:19-22. The Greek word for death is THANATOS which means "separation." In a physical sense it refers to the separation of the soul/spirit from the body; and in a spiritual sense it refers to the separation that occurs between a human and God because of sin. The garden pair died immediately in a spiritual sense, and physically later although the process began that day. While we suffer the consequences of Adam's sin (a fallen world of sickness, sin and death), we do not inherit the guilt of his sin. We only bear the guilt of the sins we commit (Ezek. 18:19-20. Sin was permitted but not caused by God. Sin results when human free will is used to violate the laws of God:

Our own wrong use of free will brings about personal sin.

The of sins of others effects not only the individual, but others as well.

Violation of natural law brings harm and death.

Violation of man's law brings negative consequences.

Natural disaster (floods, fires, earthquakes, tornados, etc.) bring harm and death.

Chance factors (Eccl. 9:11, Luke 10:31) may also bring harm and death.

Suffering does not mean:

That God does not love you (Heb. 12:5-15),

That you are being punished for your sins (Job, & Luke 13:1-5),
That you lack faith in God (2 Cor. 12:6-10),
That God does not hear or respect your prayers (1 John 5:14-15).

The fact that we do not always know or understand the cause of our suffering does not mean that we cannot control our response to suffering. We need to realize that most of what happens in the world is against the will of God. Those who think that whatever happens will be according to the will of God are wrong! When the majority give allegiance to Satan, the god of this world, it is inevitable that bad things will happen (2 Cor. 4:3-4). Death is not only our enemy, but the Lord's enemy as well (1 Cor. 15:20-26). (For a fuller treatment of the above, see Hicks, Yet Will I Trust Him).

WHERE IS GOD WHEN YOU NEED HIM?

Right where he has always been...in you, and around you:

Containing the problem within limits - 1 Cor. 10:13,

Suffering with you - Heb. 2:14-18, 4:14-16, Isa. 63:9,

Working to bring blessing - Rom. 8:28,

Bringing steadfastness through trial - Jas. 1:2-4, Rom. 5:3-5,

Working to bring about perfection - Heb. 5:8-9,

An outstanding Biblical passage dealing with God's help in times of trouble: While many passages offer help in hard times, Romans 8:16-39 is considered by many to be a favorite one. "Verses 17, 18, 21, 30 speak of incomparable glory which lies ahead of us at the end. In the meantime we face sufferings, bondage to decay, groaning, hardship, persecution, famine, danger, death, etc. (verses 18, 22-23, 26, 28, 38). - Nevertheless, despite all this, there are some facts we know, are convinced of, and should consider: We now have the Holy Spirit as the first fruits of our salvation. The Spirit helps us pray. The Father works for the good of His children whom He is conforming more and more to the likeness of Christ. We are justified through Him who died, was raised to life and to heaven, and now intercedes for us there. Since all of these things are so, absolutely nothing in the cosmos can separate us from His love. That's breathtaking and incredible! And what should our attitude be during this groaning time? Note two phrases: 'We wait eagerly....we wait patiently, due to our hope (vs. 23-25). Wait with eager yearning; wait with patient endurance; remember the Glory-time is coming. These truths and attitudes can undergird and sustain us

when life falls apart.” (When Life Falls Apart, Alex Wilson, INTEGRITY, Jan/Feb 1997.)

BUT.....

Couldn't God keep my tragedy from happening? Yes he could, but how often would we have Him do that? Jn. 16:33, 1 Jn. 4:4. Then why didn't He? We don't always know...but we trust Him.

“Another inadequate explanation of human suffering is that God simply cannot do anything about it. This is fallacious thinking. God does have ultimate and omnipotent control over His universe. His love for us is not diminished simply because we do not accept it or believe in the divine scheme of things, God has set limits upon Himself. The very nature of the universe makes it impossible for Him to do things that are mutually opposed to His design. For example, He cannot be present and absent at the same time nor can He make a square circle. God cannot save a lost soul apart from His plan of salvation in Christ. The very nature of the universe helps us to understand human suffering. The universe is a system of law and order and precision. And this uniformity in God's creation has much to do with the pain and sickness, heartache and disappointment that come with living in the natural world. In the natural universe there are boundaries that must be respected. We cannot extend life on the day it comes for us to die. We cannot reverse in one day what a lifelong habit has done to our physical body. When we abuse the laws of nature, we must suffer the consequences. When God created us as creatures with free wills, He opened the door to suffering. We have the right of choice to do the right things. When we choose to do the wrong things, we must pay the price. (The Dilemma of Human Suffering, Goad, S.C., Gospel Advocate May 1995).

DO WE REALLY WANT TO TAKE AWAY SUFFERING?

Take away human freedom of choice?

Would we really like it if we had God on a string & He had to do our will?

Would we like for Him to take away pain and suffering?

Would we really like to live in this sinful, imperfect world without the benefit, discipline, and learning that come through adversity?

“If God removed suffering, we would serve Him out of purely selfish interests.

If God promised immunity from suffering, he would rob us of the freedom which we hold and cherish so dearly. He would be obliged to intervene constantly in our daily routines. Freedoms would become non-existent. God never promised to remove suffering in this life.” (Goad, Op. Cit.).

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF SUFFERING?

- 1) Suffering keeps the world from becoming too attractive (Luke 12:15).
- 2) Suffering can bring out our best (Hebrews 2:10).
- 3) Suffering gives an opportunity for silencing the enemies of God (1 Pet. 2:15).
- 4) Suffering makes us more appreciative (2 Tim. 1:8-12).
- 5) Suffering makes us more aware of our dependence on God (2 Cor. 12:7-10).
- 6) Suffering helps purify us (1 Pet. 1:6-7).
- 7) Suffering enhances our prayers (James 5:13).
- 8) Suffering helps us to be sympathetic (2 Cor. 1:5-7).
- 9) Suffering validates our faith (Psalm 119:71).
- 10) Suffering helps us learn obedience (Hebrews 5:7-9).
- 11) Suffering can enhance the glory of God (1 Pet. 3:13-17). (Some of the above taken from “The Problem of Suffering: Why Does God allow it?, W. Smith, Carolina Christian, January 1997)
- 12) Suffering is a means of victory for the Christian (1 Peter 5:10).
“We are not called to triumph over suffering; we are called to triumph through suffering.
The suffering we are called to witness to is not a helpless suffering begging for sympathy or an accusing suffering demanding guilt. It is the life-affirming suffering, a part of the dignity of human life that will not be denied.” (“Near the Cross”, R. Morgan, OTHER SIDE, Mar/Apr 1999)

HOW TO HELP OTHERS WHO ARE SUFFERING:

- 1) Avoid statements that are harmful (“your sin brought this on,” “ignore the suffering and think positive thoughts,” “this is God’s will,” “I

know just how you feel," "God wanted her/him to be a flower in His garden," etc.

2) Give your love and your support, often in silence, or in necessary deeds of kindness (bring food, offer transportation, open your house to guests," etc.)

3) Give them your time.

4) Pray for them, and comfort them.

5) Do all you can to share their pain.

6) Encourage them.

7) When feasible encourage them to comfort others.

MODES OF RESPONSE TO THE UNEXPECTED OR THE UNWANTED:

1) Never give up.

2) Grieve your loss.

3) Get help.

4) Cherish your relationships.

5) Admit your failures, and then move on.

6) Keep loving.

7) Don't dominate.

8) Be creative.

9) Let the process refine you.

10) Stop looking back and wishing.

(Mom, Your Incredible!, L. Weber, Broadman & Holman, 1999, pp.115--124).

"Think of me as a fellow-patient in the same hospital who, having been admitted a little earlier, could give some advice." C.S. Lewis.

- 1) Broken worlds are not uncommon. They can happen to any of us. And if they do, we may not be able to control the damage. Don't let anyone tell you differently.
- 2) The pain of a broken-world experience is universal; the ancients knew it as well as any of us.
- 3) An unguarded strength and an unprepared heart are double weaknesses.
- 4) Personal insight is not only momentary; it is a healthy way of life. Insight is the first step in rebuilding.
- 5) Almost no one bears a heavier load than the carrier of personal secrets of the past or the present.
- 6) The person who carries a secret has sentenced himself to a dungeon.
- 7) "The one spiritual disease is thinking that one is quite well."
C.K.Chesterton.
- 8) Influences and moods, people and atmospheres, pressures and weariness: some or all of these, like a smoke screen, can distort what might otherwise be good thinking.
- 9) Wise people need to know how their spiritual and mental systems are apt to operate in the various environments.
- 10) When the body and the emotions and the mind are stretched to the limit, the risk of sinful choices climbs out of sight.
- 11) Misbehavior may often be rooted in the undisclosed things of our pasts.
- 12) A disrespect for the power of evil is a major step toward a broken personal world.
- 13) The freest person in the world is one with an open heart, a broken spirit, and a new direction in which to travel.
- 14) The process of rebuilding requires some temporary operating principles by which to navigate through the dark times.
- 15) Listen, receive, give, and then anticipate. No time in the wilderness is ever wasted for the one who intends to return what grace has given.

16) The granting of restorative grace is among the greatest and most unique gifts one Christian can give another.

17) We must assume the inevitability of attacks by an enemy hostile to our spiritual interests and build our defenses in the places he is most likely to attack.

18) The grace that helps to rebuild a broken world is something given: never deserved, never demanded, never self-induced.

19) When you have been pushed, or have fallen to the ground, there can be only one useful resolve: GET UP AND FINISH THE RACE!
(Rebuilding Your Broken World, Gordon McDonald, Inspirational Press, 1996, 3rd of 3 works by McDonald in one volume entitled, "Restoring Joy", pp. 357-359).

1) Choose a positive disposition.

2) Will to, whether you want to or not.

3) Act better than you feel.

4) Use your compass when you're off course.

5) Don't kill today with yesterday.

6) Cut your line when it's tangled.

7) Keep cool, even when you're hot.

8) Make your relationships right.

9) Go first anyway.

10) Live young, even when you're old. (Making Things Right When Things Go Wrong, Paul Faulkner, Howard Pub., 1996).

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