

20th Century Bible Course

Dear Friend:

A young mother and father stand weeping over the still form of their son. A short while before he had been so full of happiness and life. And as if that was not enough to weigh them down with heartache, it was his own brother who, in a fit of rage and jealousy, had lifted the weapon that brought death to their second born.

Where did this terrible scene take place? In the fields and orchards just outside the Garden of Eden! How soon the fruit of sin had ripened! How early the touch of death brought sorrow and agony to mankind!

Eve could have asked the same question that many other mothers have asked through the centuries. "Why, God? Why did this have to happen to someone who was so kind and innocent?" However, this mother could better give the reason for such a tragedy than any other mother. For, as we learned in our last lesson, it was through her disobedience that the flood of trouble, sickness, and death had poured into the world.

Many a man stands in the darkness, looking up at the stars. -Is anybody out there?

-Is anybody listening?

-Does anybody know we are here? -Does anybody care?

If there is a God, why doesn't He do something? Why doesn't He put a stop to this nightmare? Why is He so silent? Is He unconcerned? How easy it is to blame God for the world's heartbreaks.

Watergate did not produce the first crisis of confidence! In Lesson 7 we learned from the Word of God how one of God's created beings-Lucifer, a beautiful angel in heaven-turned in rebellion against his Creator. With his arsenal of cunning and sly insinuations, Lucifer tore down the walls of confidence and love, leaving large gaping crevices of doubt, uncertainty and fear about God and His government.

Today we shall try to see the problem of suffering from God's perspective. It is my hope that this will not only give you new and deeper insights into the whole problem of suffering and trials, but will also help you to be able to focus on the thread of God's love that never fails to run through them; and that, as a consequence, you will be sustained with a new strength and trust when you or those dear to you come face to face with the inevitable suffering, loneliness, and grief that is the lot of humanity.

With best wishes,

Your Bible Instructor

LESSON 8

WHY! WHY! WHY!

SCRIPTURE READING: JOB 1, 2 (OT 442, 443 [342])

Astronauts returning from the moon saw this earth as a beautiful blue sphere washed with clouds and seas and brilliantly clean. From that distance-if you didn't know-you could never guess the trouble it's in!

We can depend on our planet as far as the laws of physics are concerned. We can boast of a precision orbit. Astronauts could count on this earth being right where it was supposed to be when they wanted to come back! But something disturbs this little earth! It shrieks of pain and heartache. Although the minds of men race ahead of their hearts and scientists split atoms they cannot even see, the hearts of men remain unchanged. They make fiery bolts of terror that twist and melt and incinerate an entire city in one short moment. Violence in the heart becomes violence in the streets and in the skies. We stagger

along, unable to handle our troubles. And bewildered millions want to know why!

We gasp at the wreckage of a tornado and the broken bodies scattered about. We walk through a hospital corridor and see the faces of the hopeless and helpless. We shed tears over departed loved ones. It takes a strong heart not to cry out, "Is this any way to run a world? Where is God?" Once again His Word contains the answers.

Part 1--Jesus once healed a woman who had been ill for 18 years, but He didn't take the blame for her illness. In fact, God has never accepted the blame for the problems of this life. On this occasion Christ openly pointed out the guilty one.

1. Who did Jesus say caused this woman's illness? Luke 13:16

2. Who afflicted Job with boils? Job 2:7 _____

A group of Galileans apparently were killed in the midst of their worship. Christ discussed this pointless suffering in one of his discourses.

3. Did these Galileans suffer this calamity because they were worse sinners than others? Luke 13:1-3 _____

It is not wise to form hasty conclusions in our attempts to analyze suffering. And certainly this rules out any tendency to assume that those who suffer are being punished for their sins. How often it is the innocent who suffer! God is not in the business of dishing out punishment. Evil men will do their terrible deeds despite God. Those crushed by the tower of Siloam (verses 4, 5) teach us lessons about the uncertainty and cruelty of life.

4. Who gave Paul his "thorn in the flesh"? 2 Corinthians 12:7-10

Thought question: Paul, a godly Christian if ever there was one, prayed three times for this "thorn" to be removed, but God did not grant his request. What two important lessons can we extract from his experience? (verse 7) (verse 9)

If Paul could rejoice in tribulation because he knew God would give him grace to bear it and, at the same time use it to develop his character, cannot we, too, rest patiently under trials, knowing that God does, indeed, care?

5. Who is responsible for persecution? Revelation 12:13

6. Who is this dragon? (verse 9) _____

7. What's another source of at least part of our troubles? Galations 6:7

Even the best of us have sometimes brought problems upon ourselves. A man dies if he violates the law of gravity by leaping from a high building. Disregard the laws of health and you become ill. Who has polluted the air and water, bulldozed away the countryside, and in general messed things up with his technology and his trash? Man himself!

Part 2-- WHY DOES GOD PERMIT ALL THIS SUFFERING?

The question is often raised, If God permits Satan to cause suffering, is He not then at least partially responsible? Are we not considered to be a party to whatever evil deeds we could have checked but did not?

Back in the days before rapid transportation, miles from a town, a country lad lay desperately ill. When his fever continued to rise, the distraught parents sent for the physician. As the boy tossed and cried out with pain, it was not at all certain the doctor would arrive in time. Finally the welcome sound of the old Model T was heard. After a brief examination, the experienced doctor drew the anguished parents aside. There wasn't a moment to lose. If the appendix had not yet ruptured, there was hope. They could not risk the long return to a hospital. "But," he said, "I have no anaesthesia-nothing to ease the pain of the knife." Without a moment's hesitation came the parents' reply: "Operate."

Quickly the kitchen table was prepared. Water was boiled on the old iron stove while clean sheets were hurriedly torn for dressings. Tenderly the youngster was placed on the table. An older brother was

drafted to hold down one leg while the mother herself held the other one. But the doctor knew it would take more than that. He turned to the father, but there he was, already taking his place by the boy's head, pinning those flailing young arms securely under a steel-like grip. With the first deft sweep of the knife the screams of pain rent the air. It seemed they would be unable to hold the little chap down. "Daddy, stop, stop!" cried the lad in terror and pain. Tears rolled down the parents' faces as the father tried to comfort the child. How could he watch him suffer any longer? His hands and arms trembled, his voice broke, as again and again he tried to explain that the doctor did not want to hurt him, but it had to be if he was going to live. Finally the last stitch was taken and the perspiring doctor sank into a chair. "It's okay," he said. We got it in time. I'm so sorry, but we didn't have a choice."

"We understand," the grateful father assured him as his shaking arms released their hold on the sobbing child and tenderly soothed the fevered damp brow.

Tell me, did that father cease to love his son during this fearful ordeal? No! A thousand times, no! And who can say who suffered the most?

1. Who suffered with Jesus on the cross? 2 Corinthians 5:19

Let us never forget that the Father shared with the Son the suffering of Calvary. In fact, Jesus Christ proves God's love for us. Because Christ suffered and died, God can suffer with us in our suffering. And surely He is far more anxious than even we are for it all to end. It will not continue one moment longer than necessary.

God alone can fully know the sum of what Satan introduced into the universe. And He alone knew that there was only one solution, only one remedy with which to counteract sin's deadly influence.

There is nothing to indicate that Satan was aware of God's plan of salvation for man. No doubt it came to him as a great surprise when Christ promised to appear on the world scene in the form of man as man's representative, and on man's behalf to take up the fight against him. No doubt he had expected God to destroy man after he sinned, and this would have given him an opportunity to accuse Him of being a merciless executioner. But instead, Christ promised Adam and Eve that He would come and die in their place.

2. What did God promise Adam and Eve that He would do? Genesis 3:15

"I will put _____ between thee [the serpent] and the woman." "It [the woman's seed] shall bruise thy _____, and thou shalt bruise his _____."

3. To whom did the expression "her seed" refer? Galations 3:16

Through Jesus every man is given an opportunity to make his own choice between two lords-Jesus Christ or Satan, truth or falsehood (Deuteronomy 30:19). How sad that only a few are aware of this great controversy between God and Satan. The enemy of God has so successfully conditioned men's minds that most people do not even bother to investigate the matter (Hosea 4:6).

With this glimpse behind the scenes, perhaps we can begin to understand, however dimly, why God could not destroy Satan as soon as he rebelled. There was no way to explain sin to a universe that had never experienced it, and God would not, could not, have a kingdom in which His subjects served Him from fear instead of love. So He had no alternative. The plant of rebellion must grow until all could see the kind of fruit it bore.

Part 3-- THE TRUE CHARACTER OF GOD

1. What one word best describes God's character? 1 John 4:8

Simply being a human sinner is enough to activate God's love for us! "God commend-eth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us (Romans 5:8, NT 138 [108]). God's love is the one great constant in our lives.

2. How does God feel when we reject His love and choose to ally ourselves with Satan? Hosea 11:8

"How shall I _____, Ephraim?" (Note in verses 1-4 how much God had done to save him.) Matthew 23:37. "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, . . . how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a _____, and ye would not!"

God is not in the business of causing affliction. But because of this contest between the forces of evil and the forces of good which Satan started in heaven, and which our first parents chose to join, God

cannot shield even His own from the stern realities of life. He allows them to remain as one with all men. Satan may tempt them in an effort to prove them false, and God may permit the test, as he did with Job, to prove them true. But it is a tremendous comfort to know that God has left no stone unturned to help us be victorious. In this battle for our loyalties we have everything to gain and nothing to lose if we align ourselves with such a God. In the last lesson we learned of the gracious armor God has provided for all who place their trust in Him. But that is not all!

3. What other help does God promise His followers? 1 Corinthians 10:13 "God is faithful, who will not suffer [permit] you to be _____; but will with the temptation also make a way that ye may be _____."

Romans 8:28 "We know that _____ things _____ to them that love God."

2 Corinthians 12:9 "My grace is _____ for thee."

Not only does God set limits beyond which Satan cannot go, and promise us power and help from heaven, but He also assures us that from our ordeal He will work ultimate good. We may not understand how this can be, but in the hereafter it will become clear. Even in this life we may often see God's hand in our trials. Joseph's trust is a beautiful example of how good may result from an evil design (Genesis 50:20). Only in heaven will we be able to understand how these trials have served to develop a sterling character (Hebrews 12:5-11). "I have refined thee, but not with silver; I have chosen thee in the furnace of affliction" (Isaiah 48:10).

4. What assurance will help our faith to remain strong? Romans 8:35, 37

Remember this: nothing, *absolutely nothing*, can separate us from God's love. It cannot be turned off. No sin, no evil deed or thought, no vicious pain, cuts off the love of our heavenly Father. It is for us to let His matchless love work in our lives. As by faith we see His hand of love, we shall lose the bitterness of disillusionment and the terror of doubt.

You are God's masterpiece. He has a goal for you, and He uses your lifetime to produce it. Often circumstances will mar the workmanship. But love is patient. Only through Christ can God make you the way He wants you to be. He can be thwarted only if you fully reject your Lord. No wonder Paul, Peter, and the other apostles finally came to the place where they could rejoice about their sufferings and trials.

If this is not yet your experience, accept Christ as your Lord now-and it's yours!

ADDITIONAL THOUGHTS

Suffering has a multitude of causes (yet all of them relate to sin).

1. Mistakes of choice which violate natural, moral and physical laws. (When Eutychus fell asleep on a window sill, God did not work a miracle to prevent him from falling out of the window (Acts 20:9))
2. Physical calamities may be man- or Satan-caused. Examples: A poorly made dam will eventually break, leaving thousands homeless. Earthquakes, tornados, floods, or droughts may come from Satan, as they did in Job's case.
3. Victims of selfishness-our own or other's. Example: Naboth, though innocent, was killed because of Ahab's selfishness (1 Kings 21:1-16).
4. Satan leads men to inflict pain. Example: Bethlehem's boy babies slain because Satan determined to kill baby Jesus. Who can know the anguish of those mothers?
5. Hereditary weaknesses. Example: Children of alcoholics will have tendencies toward alcoholism for three or four generations (Exodus 20:5).

Positive attitudes that help us bear our trials and heartaches:

1. Consider it an honor that God believes you capable to bear it; the difficult experience then becomes a challenge to be met with God's help.
2. Consider Christ's perfect example.
3. Our sufferings are Christ's when we walk with Him (Matthew 25:40).
4. Because Christ suffered for us, we may look forward to a new earth where "affliction shall not rise up a second time" (Nahum 1:9).

SUGGESTIONS FOR ADDITIONAL READING : *The Problem of Human Suffering* by Paul Heubach.