



WHEN GOOD PEOPLE SUFFER

Studies in the Book of Job

Lesson 3

WHEN GOD FOLDS HIS ARMS

I. THE QUESTION OF “WHY?”

C. S. Lewis (1898–1963) was a brilliant, well known professor of English literature at Oxford and Cambridge in England. He was an adult and an agnostic when he came to Christ. Through the intelligence and power of his writing, he soon became known as (what Time magazine called) “The Apostle to the Agnostics.”

One of the books he wrote was on the problem of why God allows death, disease, disaster - evil - to exist in this world. He called it The Problem of Pain. It still stands as one of the best discussions on the subject in print.

But then he fell in love. Lewis met Joy through correspondence. She was an American divorcee with small children. While visiting Lewis in England, Joy found out that she had cancer. Believing she was going to die and wanting to take care of the children, Lewis married Joy. But Joy recovered. It was after the marriage and Joy’s health regained that Lewis fell deeply in love with her. And then she died.

The man who had helped others resolve the deep problems of anguish was now himself inconsolable. He kept a journal during those months of deep sorrow, which he did not want published lest it cause some young Christian to stumble. Later it was published as, A Grief Observed. In the book he records his torment as he would pound upon the doors of Heaven, only to find a great silence. Lewis was now experiencing the problem of pain.

Most of us know that frustration at some time or other in our lives. We deeply, earnestly want something from God, or see, or experience some monstrous injustice and God is silent. I am not referring here to the problem of unanswered prayer but the even more foundational problem of “WHY?” Why does God cause, permit, allow certain things to happen or not happen?

The story is told of a man who got fired, had two flat tires and came home to a burning house. He got out of the car, looked up to heaven and screamed “Why?” “Why do these things happen to me?” And a big voice came out of the clouds and said, “I don’t know; something about you just ticks me off!”

Everyone who thinks has at some time, asked “Why?”

The verse of Scripture most used at times like this is Romans 8:28. *“And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are called according to his purpose.”* To some it has become an irritable cliché. Others think it is used to try to avoid the pain, or action. That may be true for some. For me, though it may be a problem for my head, it is even more a pillow for my heart.

People come to me and say, “You know, I’ve walked with The Lord and I’ve tried to do the right thing.” Then they tell me about all the disappointments and the hurts they are suffering. And what it sounds like is, “Because I have walked with the Lord all this time, I deserve better.”

But God never promises such a life. Any religion, any theology that claims to make you immune from hurt, disaster, or tragedy is not only wrong, it is dangerous. There are those who tell us, “If you just have faith enough, you can have everything

from joy to an easy life and wealth. You can expect always, the good.” They are reading a different Bible than I am. Some have called this theology, “The say it and claim it and frame it theology.” But the whole thing is a frame. That is the problem with it. Some have called it “prosperity theology.” Ron Carlson in his series on cults puts it well. He says, *“The problem with the prosperity gospel is that you cannot preach it in Bangladesh.”*

Any gospel that you cannot preach anywhere in the world, or at any time, is a false gospel. It will not hold up with any of us who are honest with life. There is going to be hurt, sorrow, tragedy, difficulty, in the world. Paul experienced it; Jesus experienced it, and He says, *“The servant is not above his master.”* If they hated Him, they will hate you. The world has never been and never will be a friend to grace.

II. JOB’S DILEMA

The book of Job loosely divides into five parts: the prologue, the symposium, the speeches of Elihu, the nature poems (God speaking), and the epilogue.

As a whole, the book appears to have been written as a direct challenge to the time-honored doctrine that people are rewarded or punished according to their merits.

Keep in mind as you read Job that you have insights into his situation that he and his friends did not have. The first several chapters depict a conversation that takes place between God and Satan which serves to explain the things that are happening to Job. It is only at the end of the book that Job learns the entire story. Remember that we have a different perspective on the events as we encounter them than Job had.

With chapter 3, the text moves from the prose of chapters 1 and 2 into the poetry that marks most of the rest of Job. Several weeks have gone by since Job was first affected by his troubles.

His friends sat with him for an entire week without speaking, and it also took them some time to come to him when they heard of his troubles. Finally, Job speaks and complained that his suffering was an injustice from God.

Job comments on his plight by raising three questions in chapter 3. All of these are “why” questions.

- Job’s first question is “Why was I ever born?” (1-10)
- Job’s second question: “Why didn’t I die at birth?” (11-19)
- Job’s third question: “Why can’t I die right now?” (20-26)

His friends defended the idea that God was just with a variety of arguments, including that Job must have done something to deserve his suffering.

Job declared his innocence and challenged God to be his accuser.

When Job’s three friends speak, their reasoning is wrong in respect to God and to Job’s suffering. In Job 42:7 God says that Job’s three friends did not speak what was right concerning God.

Job gives excellent answers to each of his friends. This is particularly difficult because the arguments that Job’s friends offer are sound and persuasive arguments. It can be easy to assume what Job’s friends say is good advice if one does not keep the big picture in mind during the study.

The question still remains of why God allows suffering, assuming three things:

- God is all-powerful and causes everything that happens in the world. Nothing happens without His willing it.
- God is just and fair, and stands for people getting what they deserve, so that the good prosper and the wicked are punished.
- Job is a good person.

III. THREE BASIC BIBLICAL PRINCIPLES ABOUT SUFFERING

A. Suffering Is Real.

Some religions believe that suffering is just illusion. But the pain, grief and sorrow that we experience in this life are not imaginary. They are real. We cannot talk about suffering in some detached theological manner. Anguish, distress, torment and agony cannot be reasoned away by some appeal to a few Scriptures taken out of context. Suffering was so real that our Lord Himself came to live in it, experience the full depth of it, conquer it and redeem it. His suffering was real. So is ours.

B. Suffering Came into the World As a Result of the Fall of Man.

Death, pain, grief, loneliness and all other types of suffering were not part of God's original world (Genesis 1:31; 3:17-19; 5:29; Romans 5:12, 14, 18; 8:20-22; 1 Corinthians 15:21-22; Revelation 21:3-4). Hence, God is not the author for all the bad things that happen in the world. It is not fair, nor helpful to blame Him for the origin of our pain. Adam and all sinful human beings that prove themselves to be children of Adam are the ones to blame for the curse that the world is under.

C. Suffering Is Real, But It Is Not the Only Reality.

There is more to the universe than pain. God is in charge and nothing happens apart from His involvement at some level (Deuteronomy 32:39; 1 Samuel 2:6-9; 1 Chronicles 29:11-12; Proverbs 16:4; Job 2:9-10; Ecclesiastes 9:1; Isaiah 45:7; Jeremiah 18:1-23; Lamentations 3:37-38; Daniel 2:20-21; 4:17,25,35; Matthew 10:29; Luke 1:53; Acts 1:7; 17:24-26; Ephesians 1:4-5; Colossians 1:17; Revelation 4:11). God has co-opted the suffering of this world for His own purposes. The King of the entire universe uses trials and times of suffering for His own ends. God is in control and sovereign over all events.

IV. CAN WE KNOW GOD'S PURPOSES FOR SUFFERING?

A. Not Always

Sometimes God reveals His purposes to us immediately. Sometimes it is not until years later that we can look back and see some good that came from misery. And sometimes our pain remains a complete mystery to us. There is some pain that we will not understand until we see Him face to face and understand everything completely (1 Corinthians 13:12). If we cannot specifically identify the purpose for our pain, we will find ourselves in good company. Job and many other brethren did not know either. Yet we can get a glimpse behind their pain and see that the Lord was there. He had a purpose and was working rationally in all their lives, even though they did not understand. And in this we should find much encouragement. When we do not understand why we are suffering, we experience a doubly difficult burden. Ultimately, we must trust in the God who loves us and has promised that "...in all things God is working for the good for those who love Him" (Romans 8:28).

Our trust is in a Person, not in formulas, principles and explanations. When we are ignorant of the reasons for our pain, we must place our confidence in a God Who has demonstrated throughout history that He is wise and loving in all that He does.

B. Sometimes

Absolutely! Spiritually speaking, it should be enough for us to simply trust our

Creator, but the Lord knows our human weakness and infirmity. So in the Scriptures God reveals to His children several possible explanations for their trials, pain and hardships. The God we love is a reasonable and purposeful God and He has demonstrated His love for us by revealing to us reasons for our pain. If we are going through a trial today it may help to know that there is an explanation for our suffering. Sometimes we may be able to specifically identify in Scripture the purpose for our pain.

There is rationality to adversity, because God is a rational God. He has not abandoned us. He is working. God is not obligated to tell us why He does what He does. But by His grace God has revealed to us in the Scriptures the way He works in the lives of His saints. He does this so that we might have greater confidence in Him. Our Lord said, *"I will never leave you nor forsake you"* (Hebrews 13:5). And Peter said, *"Cast all your cares upon Him, because He cares for you"* (1 Peter 5:7). Two thousand years later we can still trust these words.

V. SOME SUFFERINGS ARE FOR OUR OWN BENEFIT

A Suffering As Consequence (Sowing and Reaping)

Much of our suffering is a result of the spiritual, moral and natural consequences of our own actions and choices. Many things get blamed on God, which simply are not His fault. If you jump off a ten-story building and kill yourself, you can't blame that on God. The law of gravity is the same for everyone. If you violate the natural laws of the universe, then you pay the consequences.

Just as there are natural laws in the universe, so there are moral and spiritual laws. These laws are the same for everyone. If you violate them you will suffer the consequences of your actions. That is not God's fault, it is yours.

God often allows His children to experience the natural consequences of their actions. The results are painful, but God is not obligated to deliver us from our wrong choices. Taking responsibility for our actions instead of blaming God is a step toward maturity.

Here are some passages for you to read which illustrate the principle of consequential suffering:

1. **Galatians 6:7-10** - The creation principle of sowing and reaping stated by Paul.
2. **Numbers 14:41-45** - God said to the Israelites, "Do not go. I won't go with you." Israel said, "We'll go anyway." They experienced the natural consequence of their action.
3. **Deuteronomy 28-30** - In these chapters God sets before the Israelites a moral choice. If they love and follow God, He will prosper and protect them. If they abandon King God, then He will no longer be their protector and they will suffer all the consequences of life without God as their king.
4. **2 Samuel 11:1-5** - David's adultery results in an unplanned pregnancy, which brings much suffering to himself, his family and his nation.
5. **1 Kings 11:1-5** - Solomon ignored God's warning of intermarriage with unbelievers. This introduced the nation to idolatry and division. Solomon himself lost fellowship with God until near the end of his life.
6. **Acts 20:7-12** - Eutychus' death is a result of natural consequences. Of course, the amazing thing is that God in His mercy sometimes delivers

us from even the hurtful consequences of our actions. That is grace. That is undeserved mercy.

B. Suffering As Correction

This type of suffering is a little different than the law of sowing and reaping. The suffering we experience here is not a natural consequence of our sin. This is suffering brought into our life by God to stop a pattern of sin before we experience natural consequences. God sees a specific sin or habit pattern which needs correcting in our life and says, "I had better administer some correction before this thing really gets out of hand." This is called God's discipline or correction.

The mother who spans her child to stop him from running into the street is administering correctional suffering. She administers discipline so that the child will change his actions and not experience the natural consequence of those bad actions.

God disciplines us out of love in the same manner. Of course, we experience this discipline as suffering. God sees it as short-term pain for long term gain. Here are some examples for you to read about:

1. **Psalm 32 - God ordained illness (v. 4) as a result of a specific sin in David's life.**
2. **James 5:14-16 - A Christian brother experiencing illness as a result of an unconfessed and undealt with sin in his life.**
3. **1 Corinthians 11:29, 30 - Weakness, sickness, death as a result of improper participation in the Lord's supper.**
4. **Acts 5:1-11 - An example of God's discipline and correction in the early church, so that the rest of the church would not lie to the Holy Spirit.**
5. **1 Corinthians 5:1-5 - In this case, the church is disciplining the individual in place of God. Suffering is being imposed so that his spirit may be saved on the day of the Lord.**

C. Suffering As Education

Educational suffering is not a consequence of an immediate sin. Educational suffering is a challenge (we call it a 'trial') that God brings into our life to help us develop and grow. Educational suffering is meant to bring spiritual fruit and positive character traits into our life.

God often puts us in situations that initially seem to be beyond us. "Why should I have to go through this? I did not do anything to deserve this in my life. This does not seem fair, God." God puts us in these situations to help us become mature. Educational suffering is a little like military boot camp. It gets us in shape and makes us a warrior for God.

Read the following Scripture passages. You will find a key word repeated in each of these passages. It is the word "teach" or "learn."

1. **Deuteronomy 8:3 - Why did Israel have to go through the wilderness? To teach Israel that man must live by God's words as well as bread.**
2. **Hebrews 12:5-11 - God places us in suffering situations that we might share in His holiness (v.10) and righteousness and peace (v.11).**
3. **Hebrews 5:7-10 - Jesus Himself had to "learn" obedience through the things He suffered.**
4. **Hebrews 2:10 - Jesus was "made perfect" or "became mature" through suffering.**

5. 2 Corinthians 12:1-10 - Preventive suffering so that Paul would learn humility and rely on the Lord's power.

What are some positive traits that times of trial can develop in us? Here are some of the positive traits that God wants to build in us through suffering:

- Endurance - Romans 5:3
- Character - Romans 5:4
- Hope - Romans 5:4
- Knowledge of God's love - Romans 5:5
- Empathy - 2 Corinthians 1:3,4
- Obedience - Hebrews 5:8
- Maturity - James 1:4
- Proven faith - 1 Peter 1:7

D. Suffering As Evaluation

God uses suffering to test us, to show us the level we have attained, and to open our eyes to areas we still need to work on. These sufferings are often given for the specific purpose of testing our faith. Do we really trust God or do we just say we trust God? Evaluational suffering tells us the answer to that question. Read these Scriptures. The key word in these passages is "test."

1. **Genesis 22:1-18 - God tested Abraham. Note the following pattern: Test...Verdict...Blessing.**
2. **Deuteronomy 8:2 - Israel tested during the 40 years in the wilderness to know what was in their heart.**
3. **Luke 4:1-14 - The Spirit drove Jesus into the wilderness to be tested.**
4. **1 Peter 1:6-7 - Peter said that the purpose of the suffering this church was facing was to test their faith.**

E. Stanley Jones once said,

I was talking to a bishop who had retired. He was frustrated. When he was no longer in the limelight of the bishopric, he was frustrated and told me so. He wanted to know the secret of victorious living. I told him it was in self-surrender. The difference was in giving up the innermost self to Jesus. The difference was in the texture of the things that held him. When the outer strands were broken by retirement, the inner strands were not enough to hold him. Apparently he had a case of 'limelight-itis' instead of a case of surrender to Jesus.

Fortunately, with me, surrender to Jesus was the primary thing, and when the outer strands were cut by this stroke, my life did not shake. I need no outer props to hold my faith, for my faith holds me."

- E. Stanley Jones, Methodist missionary to India after a stroke that left him immobile and virtually speechless.

VI. SOME SUFFERINGS IS FOR THE BENEFIT OF OTHERS

A. Suffering As Sacrifice

Some suffering is for the sake of someone else. The first four reasons for suffering were for our own benefit. But not all difficulty is for us. The next four explanations for suffering are for the benefit of others. Sacrificial suffering should not be too difficult for us to understand since examples of sacrificial suffering abound in the natural world: the mother who suffers to bring a baby into the world; the parent

who sacrifices to raise a child; the living donor who gives up his kidney for a transplant recipient, etc.

Numerous examples of sacrificial suffering can be found in the Bible too:

1. **Genesis 45:4-7 - Joseph suffered loneliness, slavery and jail in order to deliver the family of Israel from death.**
2. **Isaiah 53:5, 6, 8, 10, 12 - Jesus suffered for our benefit.**
3. **Romans 16:3 - Priscilla and Aquila suffered for Paul.**
4. **1 Samuel 20:1-33 - Jonathan suffered for David.**
5. **Romans 14:13-21; 15:1-3 - Stronger brother suffered for the weaker.**

B. Suffering As Revelation

God causes a situation of suffering so that He might reveal Himself or glorify Himself to others.

1. **Hosea 1-3 - Hosea was commanded to do something which God knew would involve suffering for him.**

Hosea was commanded to marry a woman that God knew would be unfaithful to Hosea. Why did God ask Hosea to suffer with an unfaithful spouse? In order that God could reveal Himself to the adulterous nation that He loved. Hosea's marriage to unfaithful Gomer was like God's marriage to unfaithful Israel.

2. **John 9:1-3 - This man was born blind so that God could glorify Himself through his healing.**

His suffering was an opportunity for God to reveal His mercy, power and love.

3. **Romans 3:25, 26 - God made Jesus to suffer in order that His divine justice might be revealed.**
4. **Romans 5:8 - Christ's suffering on the cross demonstrated and revealed God's love to us.**

C. Suffering As Persecution

As we share the good news we suffer at the hands of some who reject it:

1. **Jeremiah 20:7-10, 14-18 - The ministry God had given to Jeremiah resulted in persecution and suffering.**
2. **Matthew 5:10-12 - Suffering will come to us as a result of sharing the gospel.**
3. **1 Peter 3:14-17 - We will suffer for doing good in an evil world.**
4. **Hebrews 11:35b-39 - All of these people suffered persecution for their faith and never saw their reward in this life.**

D. Suffering As Invisible Warfare

We suffer as a result of heavenly battles about which we know nothing:

1. **Job 1 and 2 - Job never knew that the reason he suffered was because of a heavenly contest between God and Satan.**

Does that make Job just a pawn in God's chess game? No. We have no concern for pawns after they have served their purpose. But God does care for Job. That is why there are chapters 38-42 in the book of Job.

2. **Luke 22:31, 32 - On the human level Peter's denial of Jesus is a lack of faith.**

But here we get a glimpse of a heavenly battle going on as well. Peter will be sifted by Satan. Jesus is also a participant in this heavenly battle. He prays that Peter's faith would not completely fail.

3. Ephesians 6:12 - There is an invisible realm of conflict about which we know little and yet we are intimately involved in the struggle.

This struggle causes suffering for us and yet is largely beyond our ability to comprehend.

VII. BIBLICAL ANSWERS TO THE PROBLEM OF GOD'S SILENCE

(SOME REPETITION FROM LESSON 2)

Psalm 73 speaks of the disillusionment of the Psalmist about the prosperity of the wicked until he went into the sanctuary. What would he have learned there?

A. He Would Have Learned that God Is Not the Author of Sin.

They would have taught him in the synagogue (Genesis, chapters 1-3) that God created the world, but He created it perfect. When Adam and Eve came from the breath of God, they came without sin, there was no evil. Then, he would have learned in chapter 3 that the tempter came and man chose to sin, and it was because of man's sin that man fell and because of sin, death came into the world and with it all the disease and tragedies that we now know. Because man who was made to have dominion over the world was brought down, God brought down nature in order to keep the balance. All of nature turned and as part of the curse, no longer yielded gladly. Death and disease and natural calamity, and moral evil and natural evil all came because of the sin of man. God, he would have learned, is not the responsible author of sin.

Why do we experience sin and evil? Although God planned all these things, we cannot lay the blame on Him. We sinned voluntarily; we desired to rebel.

Bryan J. Leech put it well in his hymn "Kind and Merciful God":

*"Kind and merciful God, we've neglected your Word
And the truth that would guide us aright;
We have lived in the shade of the dark we have made,
When you willed us to walk in the light."*

B. He Would Have Learned that God Ran the Risk of Freedom.

God ran the risk of not making us robots, little automatons, so that we would walk around and He would say "Do you love me?" We would say, "we love you, Father." And He would say, "Will you obey me?" We would say, "We obey you, Father." "Do this." "We will do that, God." He did not want robots. He wanted free, choosing willing people.

C. He Would Have Learned that Actions Have Consequences.

He would have learned that much of evil is simply natural consequences in life. Once having entered into a fallen world, we now live in a world where actions have consequences. Many things that happen in life that we call evil and bad are simply the natural consequences, not a matter of punishment, just the natural consequences of the fact that actions always have consequences. They have consequences for the individual, and they have consequences for others. We are linked to all other human beings. The poet says, "Ask not for whom the bell tolls, (when there is a death) it tolls for thee" because that death affects you and it affects me.

D. He Would Have Learned that the Worse Thing About Sin Is That the Innocent Suffer with the Guilty.

Sin would not nearly be so bad if I only had the consequences of my own ac-

tions brought upon me, but that does not happen, does it? The innocent suffer with the guilty. That is one of the worst things about sin.

E. He Would Have Learned that This Life Is Not the Place of Reward or Punishment.

All the hope of the believer is wrapped up in the coming of the Messiah, and you and I are looking forward to that blessed hope. That's when God is going to make all things right.

As I Chronicles 16:33 says, "*God will come in judgment.*" God is just. He will reward. He will punish.

F. He Would Have Learned that God Gives Enough Evidence that the Believing Heart may have Certainty, But Never So Much Evidence That the Element of Faith is Eliminated.

God is not going to prove Himself so completely that He overwhelms the mind and pushes away the will. He is too much of a gentleman to break down the door of your heart.

G. He Would Have Learned that We Must See Things from an Eternal Perspective.

The Psalmist said, "*When I went into the sanctuary of God, then I understood their end. Surely you set them in slippery places. You cast them down to destruction*" (Psalm 73:16–18). He learned that God will prove His justice. God will be just.

He could have known that from Isaiah 53, that there would come a day when the Messiah would be wounded for our transgressions, would be bruised for our iniquities, and the chastisement of our peace would be upon Him; with His stripes we would be healed. Then justice would be done by taking it out on the Messiah, on His Son because God loves us.

VIII. GOD'S SILENCE DOES NOT MEAN HE IS NOT ACTING

A. We Should Understand All Circumstances in the Light of God's Omniscience and Omnipotence.

The God of all the earth will do what is right. Promises for believers should also be a part of our outlook and a true comfort to us: "*All things work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose,*" and even in the midst of judgment and wrath, we are told that "*The just will live by faith*" (Romans 1:17).

Many times we have a worldly perspective on our suffering when God seems silent, when we should have our hearts fixed on the Kingdom of heaven. The sufferings that many go through are painful and real, and yet there is a light at the end of the tunnel. The Apostle Paul had the proper perspective, "*I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us*" (Romans 8:18). Paul placed his sufferings (more than many of us will ever suffer) on a scale with the glory of heaven; there was no comparison for him, nor should there be for us. Our life now is like a drop of water taken from the ocean of eternity. If we have to suffer now, understand that soon we will stand before the throne of God with resurrected bodies; never again will we hunger or thirst or have pain and sorrow for the former things will have passed away.

Is God doing something now? Yes, our heavenly Father is always at work,

both willing and doing His good pleasure. What should our perspective be concerning calamity? The God of all the earth will always do what is right. He is able to discern between the righteous and the unrighteous, and soon those who are faithful will receive an inheritance that is reserved in heaven for us that will never perish, spoil or fade.

B. God Has At Least Three Ways (He May Have Three Million Ways) to Answer Your Prayer.

1. God may act in Intervention.

This is how He worked in the days of miracles, parting the sea, raising the dead, healing, etc. God can still work miracles. You are never in a “box” with God; He can open the top and pull you out. He can make the walls fall down flat, as He did at Jericho, and let you go walking out, or He can let the bottom fall out – but underneath are the everlasting arms!

2. God may act in Convention.

God usually works through the normal outworking of the events and circumstances of life. He brought about the rescue of the children of Jacob (Israel) from the starvation caused by famine by working through the tragedies, suffering and triumphs of the life of Joseph. He fitted David to be Israel’s great king through the ordering of circumstances. He works through the ordinary course of our lives to bring about His purposes. He is the blessed controller of all things. Martin Luther called this aspect of God’s working, “The left hand of God.”

3. God may act in Inner-vention.

Sometimes God chooses not to change the difficult circumstances but lets us endure them in order to bring about certain character qualities in us, or a magnification of qualities in Him. Paul experienced this in 2 Corinthians 12:7-10. He wrote,

“To keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassingly great revelations, there was given me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. But he said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.’ Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me.” (NIV)

A. A. Hodge sums it up well:

“The apparent incongruousness of the facts, and hence the difficulty of the problem, we admit. But we have seen God because we have seen Christ, and we have learned to read all the course of providence in the light of the Cross. Since the baptism of Pentecost we have been convicted of sin and of a guilt we are utterly unable to gainsay or remove. We have been convinced that the finite can never measure the Infinite, and that self-convicted sinners can never judge the integrity of the All-holy. In the light of Calvary we have an impregnable assurance that the Father of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ is unlimited in wisdom and in power, and that he can do no wrong. Bowing our heads in unquestioning submission to his sovereign rights, and with confidence in his absolute perfection, we exclaim, in the face of all apparent anomalies: “O the depth of the riches

both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out! For who hath known the mind of the Lord? Or who hath been his counselor? Or who hath first given to him and it shall be recompensed to him again? For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen" (Rom. 11:33-36).

- A. A. Hodge, Evangelical Theology (1890; reprinted Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1976), pp. 37-38.

C. Conclusion:

1. Realize the sufficiency of God.

In Psalm 73:25 to 28, you have his conclusion. Look at it. *"Whom have I in heaven but You? And there is none upon earth that I desire besides You."*

The problem of evil is the Gordian knot of all theologies and philosophies. God never gives a full answer to the problems and the questions related to evil. What He does do is to say, *"I am enough for you."* Matthew 24:6-7, 21 make it clear that eventually this present world order will be judged and brought to an end, and God's Kingdom will be fully manifested and established. He will wipe away every tear, and pain and sorrow will cease. Even though we should continue to pray that relief would come to those who suffer tragedy, let us never lose heart at apparently unanswered prayer. Instead let us pray, *"Thy Kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven."* Our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed.

The most important thing in life is this: *"Whom have I in heaven but You? And there is none upon earth that I desire besides You."* Romans 8:28 is still true. It may be a problem for the head, but it is a pillow for the heart. God is good and wise as well as great. He is too good to ever let anything unnecessarily cruel come into your life. *"All things,"* Paul says, *"work for good to those who love God,"* (not that they are all good, but God will work them for good).

And God is too wise to ever make a mistake. He permitted it to happen. There is a reason for it. Someone bears responsibility, sure, but there is a reason why He allowed it to come into your life.

The solution to the problem is not a syllogism or a set of propositions to answer the questions of our minds as much as a relationship to God that satisfies the longings of the heart.

2. Realize that this world is designed to glorify God, not make us happy.

Christianity asserts that the highest good is not our happiness; it is not even our holiness; it is the manifestation of God's attributes. Hodge wrote:

"The glory of God being the great end of all things, we are not obliged to assume that this is the best possible world for the production of happiness, or even for securing the greatest degree of holiness among rational creatures. It is wisely adapted for the end for which it was designed, namely, the manifestation of the manifold perfections of God. It may, in conclusion, be safely asserted that a universe constructed for the purpose of making God known, is a far better universe than one designed for the production of happiness."

- Charles Hodge, Systematic Theology

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

Read Lesson 2 and share a time that you simply had to trust because you were not able to see God's purposes.

Read Job 21-31 and answer the following questions:

1. Of what sins does Eliphaz accuse Job? (22:6-9)
2. What does Eliphaz counsel Job to do? (22:21-22)
3. What is Job's response to Eliphaz' charge of wickedness? (23:11-12)
4. In 23:8-10 of what is Job confident, even though he cannot find God?
5. Of whom do the wicked take advantage? 24:1-12

What is the answer to Bildad's questions in 25:4?

6. As Job continues his discourse, what does he steadfastly maintain? (27:5-6)
7. As his discourse describes the difficulty of finding wisdom, to what does Job attribute its true source? (28:20-28)
8. How does Job describe the days gone by when he was respected by everyone?
9. What things had he done? (29:1-17)
10. In the present, though, who mocks him? (30:1)
11. What kind of covenant had Job made with his eyes? Why? (31:1-4)
12. What is Job's final request as he ends his words? (31:35)