

JOB SERIES SIX
WHY WE SUFFER AND HOW TO SURVIVE-AND THRIVE
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JOB 4-31; JOB 8:1-7; 1 CORINTHIANS 13:12; ACTS 5:41; PHILIPPIANS 1:29; 1 PETER 3:17; 4:12-19;
JOSHUA 7:10-12; JOHN 5:14; 1 CORINTHIANS 11:31-32; JAMES 5:13-16; 2 CORINTHIANS 12:7;
JOHN 9:1-3; 2 CORINTHIANS 4:7-12; JOB 23:10; ROMANS 5:3-5; HEBREWS 12:4-11; MATTHEW
8:23-27; ROMANS 8:28-29; PSALM 90:10; JOHN 11:4; EPHESIANS 1:15-19; 3:14-19;
PHILIPPIANS 1:9-11; COLOSSIANS 1:9-12; 2 CORINTHIANS 12:9-10; GENESIS 32, 38
(SERMON 1586)

We are entering onto holy ground as we approach the subject of suffering. We must enter with humble hearts.

I have noticed that intense suffering has a myriad of effects on people—but two results predominate. Some rise above it. Their lives are literally deepened and “made” by the experience. Others wallow in it and never get over it.

Last week dealt with the importance of comforting those who suffer. Mourning and comforting begin to heal the hurt. (That sermon, as well as the next several, is based on the thirty chapters of Job we overviewed last Sunday).

It is hard to know what to say to a person who has been struck by tragedy, but it is easier to know what not to say:

1. Don't say anything critical of the mourner (“don't take it so hard,” “try to hold back your tears, you're upsetting people”).
2. Don't say anything which tries to minimize the mourner's pain, (“it's probably for the best,” “it could be a lot worse”). Minimizing the mourner's pain is likely to be misguided and unappreciated.
3. Don't say anything which asks the mourner to disguise or reject his or her feelings, (“we have no right to question God,” “God must love you to have selected you for this burden”).

Once we are well into mourning and comforting, it is time to move on with the healing.

One of the first questions we all have is Why? It is helpful to know the purpose of what is going on. This is one of the big issues in Job's mind as illustrated in JOB 10:1-22. We don't want to suffer for nothing. If we are going to suffer we want to suffer for something. Wouldn't it be even better if we were suffering for Someone.

LET ME SHARE A BIBLICAL THEOLOGY OF SUFFERING.

The assumed syllogism in the Book of Job is enunciated in JOB 8:1-7:

God punishes the wicked with suffering.

Job is suffering.

Therefore, God is punishing Job for wickedness.

(If Job will repent of his wickedness, God will remove the punishment and suffering.)

There are other syllogisms in present-day reasoning which deal with the “whys” of suffering.

A good theology of suffering begins with our world-view. This is not a perfect world. It is a good world. It is filled with many good things—after all, God made it. But, it is broken. It is bent. The Fall of some Angels and the Fall of Man have left our world full of suffering and evil and pain. In fact, God tells us that Satan is the God of this world.

There are some things that we will just have to live with—we are not entitled to know all the answers now. We will learn all the answers later (1 Corinthians 13:12).

LET'S DISCUSS SOME GOD-ORDAINED, BIBLICALLY REVEALED REASONS FOR TRIALS AND SUFFERING:

1. Am I Paying A Price For Following Christ? (Acts 5:41; Philippians 1:29)
2. Am I Suffering For Doing Good? (1 Peter 3:17; 4:12-19)
3. Is This Discipline (Punishment) For A Sin I've Committed? (Joshua 7:10-12; John 5:14; 1 Corinthians 11:31-32; James 5:13-16)
4. Is This Intended To Keep Me From Future Sin? (2 Corinthians 12:7)
5. Is God Using This So That His Glory May Be On Display In My Life? (John 9:1-3; 2 Corinthians 4:7-12).
6. Is This An Instructive Experience (Discipline) Designed For My Personal Growth and/or Spiritual Maturity? (Job 23:10; Romans 5:3-5; Hebrews 12:4-11)
7. Is This Designed To Increase My Faith And God Dependence? (Matthew 8:23-27)
8. Is God Using This To Mold Me Into The Image Of Christ? (Romans 8:28-29)
9. Is It Time To Die? (Psalm 90:10; John 11:4)

LET'S MOVE FROM A RATIONAL UNDERSTANDING OF THE *WHYS* OF SUFFERING TO THE MORE RELATIONAL AND EMOTIONAL HEALING SIDE OF SUFFERING: "NOW THAT THIS HAS HAPPENED TO ME, HOW AM I GOING TO RESPOND?"

However we answer (or are unable to answer) the *Why* question, there comes the time to move on by asking the question, "Now That This Has Happened To Me, How Am I Going to Respond?" This answer to this *How* question is best lived out in relationships.

God never intended for us to handle our sufferings alone.

1. Turn to God

Remember Psalm 23:4: "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me."

Learn to "pray from the inside out."

As we mature in Christ we transition from the temporal to the eternal.

God is much more concerned that we are praying for our spirit which is eternal than for our body which is decaying and will soon perish (Ephesians 1:15-19; 3:14-19; Philippians 1:9-11; Colossians 1:9-12). God will answer prayers for the maturity of our inside spirit 1000 times out of 1000. God will sacrifice the body every time if that is what is needed to mature our inner, eternal spirit.

God gives us the grace when we need it—often not a minute earlier: "My grace is sufficient for you" (2 Corinthians 12:9-10).

Notice the growth in maturity and understanding in Jacob's life from when he first prayed in the midst of suffering near the beginning of his walk with God (Genesis 28) to how he prayed twenty years later (Genesis 32).

2. Turn to others

Don't go through suffering alone.

Now is the time for encouragement, advice, lessons, logic and reasons, understanding, dealing responsibly with guilt—and more comfort (2 Corinthians 1:3-4).

3. "And it came to pass..."