

"A Lesson from Job"

Suffering has been a part of all our lives, and we wonder why God would allow this suffering to take place. Hello, I'm Phil Sanders, and this is a Bible study "In Search of the Lord's Way." Stay with us and we'll explore the problem of suffering.

Welcome to In SEARCH of the Lord's Way! We're here to search the Scriptures for God's will. God's word opens the door to understanding the greatest questions of life. It teaches us where we came from, what our purpose in life is all about, and what will happen to us after we die. While we may never know why specific things happen, the Scriptures do give us a broader perspective on why we suffer at all. Some can hardly understand why things happen, but it helps to know that our suffering is not in vain and actually has some valuable benefits in life. Thanks for taking time with us today. We want to be a part of your life each week.

For many months now we've suffered with the problems caused by COVID-19. While many of us have survived the virus, others have passed away, leaving their families in pain and sorrow. For many life doesn't seem fair. They wonder if God is picking on them. They wonder if God really loved them why He allows so much unexplained suffering. Obviously sin, crime, and war have brought much suffering. The sins of others and our own sins have caused much heartache. We also realize our own imperfections, weaknesses, and ignorance bring suffering. But this doesn't explain the natural disasters like hurricanes, tornados, fires, snow storms, and volcanoes. Nor does it give us reasons why diseases affect the innocent. So we ask why.

We ask why, but we don't always get an answer that will satisfy us now. Some things we'll never know in this lifetime. Perhaps a better question when we hurt is "What now?" What will we do to alleviate the pain? What will we do with our faith. After more than fifty years of preaching, I know that trusting God always helps. You can let suffering make you bitter or make you better. What you do matters!

We offer this study free on why we suffer. And if you'd like a printed copy of our study and live in the United States, mail your request to In Search of the Lord's Way, P.O. Box 371, Edmond, OK 73083 or send an e-mail to searchtv@searchtv.org. Or, call our toll-free telephone number. That number is 1-800-321-8633. We also have materials free on our website at www.searchtv.org.

We'll now worship in song, read from 2 Corinthians 1:3-7, and explore the question of suffering.

Our reading today comes from 2 Corinthians chapter 1 verses 3 to 7, and Paul gives people comfort and hope. "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. For just as the sufferings of Christ are ours in abundance, so also our comfort is abundant through Christ. But if we are afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation; or if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which is effective in the patient enduring of the same sufferings which we also suffer; and our hope for you is firmly grounded, knowing that as you are sharers of our sufferings, so also you are sharers of our comfort." That's a reading that gives hope and help to those who are going through tough times.

Let's pray together. "Father we're thankful for the comfort You give to us each day. We're thankful for Your promises, for Your blessings, and for the hope we have of eternal life. Father, be with us and strengthen us, and help us always to do Your will. In Jesus Name, Amen."

Things happen to us all, and we don't know why. Some people assume God may be picking on them, but hard times and heartache come to us all. No one is exempt. Some folks suffer in silence, and

we never know what heartaches and afflictions linger inside. When I preach, I remember that people have hurts, frustrations, temptations, weaknesses, and fears. They've come to worship God and to find strength, wisdom, comfort, and hope!

Peter wrote in 1 Peter 5:6 to 11, "Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you. Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world. And after you've suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who's called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you. To him be the dominion forever and ever. Amen."

Suffering does indeed come to us all, the righteous and the unrighteous. The Old Testament tells an ancient story of a man who loved God but endured great suffering. And his name is Job. Job feared God and turned away from evil, but that fact didn't keep him from heartache and physical pain. Though he was the greatest man of the East, he lost nearly everything in a single day. Soon after that he was afflicted with loathsome sores from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head. His wife and his friends became miserable comforters, blaming Job of sin that caused his suffering. Job, however, held fast to his integrity. Job wanted to face God and ask Him why this happened to him.

God never answered Job's question of why. Now we know so much more than Job knew. Job never knew of the discussion in the heavenly council, but we do. Job never understood Satan's false charge against God or the part that Job played in the dispute, but we can know. More than that, we know of Jesus, of his cross, of His forgiveness, and of heaven. We're blessed with a Bible and the church; Job never had either. And though we have so much more understanding than Job had, we may never fully discover the reason that some tragedy strikes us.

While God did not reveal an answer to Job, God did reveal himself in a whirlwind. Then the Lord said to Job in chapter 40, verses 1 to 2, "Will the faultfinder contend with the Almighty? Let him who reproves God answer it." God further says, "Now gird up your loins like a man; and I will ask you, and you (that is Job) you instruct me. Will you really annul my judgment? Will you condemn me that you may be justified?" (this is verses 7 and 8). When then God asked Job dozens of questions that Job couldn't answer. Job must have stood there dumbfounded until he grasped the unspeakable majesty and the wisdom of God.

At last Job responds in Job 42:2 to 6, "I know that You can do all things, And that no purpose of Yours can be thwarted. 'Who is this that hides counsel without knowledge?' Therefore I have declared that which I did not understand, Things too wonderful for me, which I did not know." Later he says, "I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear; But now my eye sees You; Therefore I retract, And I repent in dust and ashes."

How easily we take God for granted. We would make Him like ourselves, with our limitations and faltering insight. We forget the height and depth and length and breadth of his wisdom. God doesn't need our counsel—we need his! Paul exclaimed:

"Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and unfathomable his ways! For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who became his counselor? Or who has first given to him that it might be paid back to him again? For from him (that is God) and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever. Amen" (Romans 11:33 to 36). Job learned that God had considered matters far beyond our understanding, and there are matters greater than ourselves.

Job surrendered to God, who knows what we don't know and sees what we can't see. Job's God could see the end from the beginning, as Isaiah said in Isaiah 46 verses 8 to 10. Could Job have ever imagined that thousands of years later men would still be talking about his suffering and the righteousness of God? Could Job have known how much comfort others have gained through his faith and patience? Job surrendered to God's wisdom and sovereignty. And he learned that God is wise and capable in ways beyond our understanding. We think we must understand it all and understand it right now, when what we really need is to trust our Father.

It's quite human to question the will of God in times of pain; and even Jesus wished for His cup to pass, so He wouldn't suffer in Matthew 26:39. But in the end, Jesus surrendered to the will of the Father. And His ultimate prayer was, "My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, your will be done" (Verse 42). Now that wasn't easy for Him to pray, nor is it easy for us.

Nothing may fully satisfy our heartbreak at the time that we hurt most. Because we don't know why, we must have the faith to trust in God, who sees beyond the present. Paul said with confidence and faith, "For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us" (Romans 8 and verse 18). God is able to take the most unpleasant present and turn it into an insignificant past. When we walk by faith in the promises of a loving God, the overwhelming pains of the present grow softer.

Now pain can lead us to fight against God. Let's face it: we want our way. Isaiah reminds us, "All of us like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way" (Isaiah 53:6). We don't like suffering and we can't see at the time any value in pain; but God's thoughts are not our thoughts and his ways not our ways (Isaiah 55 verses 8 and 9). We must learn to trust the wisdom of God to work things out. And just as God rewarded Job for his patience, so He'll keep his promises to us. Paul said, "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" (Romans 8 verse 28). Pain and suffering are not good, but God can cause good to come out of them. God's dealings with Job give us hope. The good was not only his but ours as well. God's power is truly amazing.

Surrender to the Lord is an unconditional thing. Jeremiah said, "I know, O Lord, that a man's way's not in himself, Nor is it in a man who walks to direct his steps" (Jeremiah 10:23). We're not always content to surrender unconditionally. We reason that we'll surrender "if" or "when" God does what we want. Yet, we're in no position to negotiate with God or to call God into question. Job tried. When he faced God in the whirlwind, Job found he wasn't so wise and took back his charges against God.

Many people say much about God's unconditional love but they say little about the need for unconditional surrender. Jesus surrendered unconditionally to his suffering in the garden of Gethsemane. Unlike Job, Jesus knew why he was to face torture and the cross. And in agony He wept loudly in the garden (Hebrews 5 verse 7); His soul was deeply grieved to the point of death (Matthew 26:38). But in the end, however, he prayed, "My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; yet not as I will, but as you will". Jesus surrendered because of His love for His Father (John 14:31) and His love for you. We too must surrender in love and trust our will to the will of the Father, even when his will is a bitter cup. Had Jesus not willingly given His life as a sacrifice upon the cross, surely we all would remain in our sins. We may never know what good God does with our suffering, but we can trust him to do what is best.

The Lord blessed the latter days of Job more than his beginning; and he had 14,000 sheep and 6,000 camels and a 1,000 yoke of oxen and a 1,000 female donkeys (Job 42 verse 12). God gave Job seven sons and three beautiful daughters; he lived another 140 years and died an old man full of days

(Job 42:12 to 17). James said, “Behold, we count those blessed who endured. You’ve heard of the endurance of Job and have seen the outcome of the Lord’s dealings, that the Lord is full of compassion and is merciful” (James 5 verse 11). God restored Job’s possessions twofold and gave him a marvelous family.

If I ever write a book on suffering, I will entitle it, *The Last Chapter Has Not Been Written*. So often we consider the moment of our suffering the whole story. In chapter 3, Job wished he’d never been born, wondered why he didn’t die at birth, and questioned why the suffering are even allowed to live. In chapter 23, Job was ready to call God to account and present his arguments. In chapter 30, Job cried out to God but felt unanswered. Job couldn’t understand the present or see his future like we do. He lived the tragedy and waited some time before chapter 42 became reality. We, too, must wait upon God. For some the last chapter is not in this life. They stoned Stephen, beheaded James and also killed Paul, and crucified Peter according to tradition.

At the close of his life, Paul said in 2 Timothy 4 verses 6 to 8, “For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come. I’ve fought the good fight, I finished the course, I’ve kept the faith; and in the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that day; and not only to me, but also to all who have loved his appearing.”

We need to remember Romans 8:35 to 39, which says, “What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? Who shall bring any charge against God’s elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? As it is written, ‘For your sake we’re being killed all the day long; we’re regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.’ No, in all these things we’re more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Let’s pray. “Father we’re thankful that You love us through good times and bad, that You’re always with us. And Father we’re thankful for the promises and the hope that we have for the future, bless us and strengthen us, and help us everyday Father to do Your will. In Jesus name, Amen.”

Jeremiah, the weeping prophet, endured rejection and pain during his entire ministry. He saw people reject the Lord’s warnings and pleas to repent. He saw Jerusalem fall and Solomon’s temple destroyed. He experienced one heartache after another. And in spite of it all he held fast to God. He wrote in Lamentations 3:22 to 24, “The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. “The LORD is my portion,” says my soul, “therefore I will hope in him.”

Not one of us is exempt from suffering. From the time of Adam and Eve when they sinned and left the Garden of Eden, we’ve had a world where suffering exists. Our physical bodies weren’t meant to last forever; decline and death comes to us all. And after death comes judgment (Hebrews 9:27), and we must prepare our souls for the day that God calls for us. We must keep the faith, endure in hope, never stop loving God, and rejoice in our salvation. Peter observed that our faith, though tested by fire, is more precious than gold and results in the salvation of our souls (1 Peter 1:6 to 9). For the faithful,

the last chapter is always the best. What will your last chapter reveal? Will it be one of blessing, or will it be one of judgment?

If you wish to draw close to God, place your trust in Him, turn from sin to His ways and repent, confess Jesus Christ as God's Son, and be baptized into Christ. And when you're baptized, God will forgive you and wash away your sins (Acts 2:38). He'll make you His child (Galatians 3), and add you to His church (Acts chapter 2). Get right with the Lord today, because you don't want to be wrong with Him, you want to be able to give with Him forever.

We hope that today's study about suffering has stirred you to consider your soul. And if you live in the United States and want a free printed copy of this message, mail your request to In Search of the Lord's Way, P.O. Box 371, Edmond, OK 73083 or send an e-mail to searchtv@searchtv.org. Or you can call the Search office toll-free at 1-800-321-8633.

Well, we'll be back next week, Lord willing. Remember to tell a friend about the program. And as always we say to you, God bless you and we love you from all of us at In Search of the Lord's Way.