

**EVERYTHING IS SACRED....ESPECIALLY SUFFERING**  
**FAITHWORKS**  
**MAY 22, 2011**

## **INTRODUCTION**

- *Summary of Jerry Sittser's Story...Suffering has many faces and results in many different experiences. Tragic car accident, unexpected death of a child, chronic illness, abusive spouse, loneliness, depression – many in our own class - painful situations that are sometimes 'accidental', sometimes caused by 'negligence', sometimes 'intentional'. Disability, mental anguish, oppression, slavery, religious persecution. I want to be careful to not underplay or overplay any experience of suffering.*
- *We cannot possibly address every experience in our limited time together. There is too much breadth to cover all aspects (for example, we won't cover the sometimes long and painful road to recovery).*
- *I am certainly no expert in suffering, and not as experienced at suffering as most in this Sunday School. I would like to come alongside you as a fellow seeker of truth and comfort.*
- *There are many views on doctrine around suffering. I will not take a dogmatic stand, as many wiser than I who have gone before me do not agree amongst one another. Instead I will attempt to lay scripture before our eyes and hearts, share thoughts from several sources, and allow God to speak to you, or motivate you to further study.*
- *As you must know, there are no easy formulae, no easy fixes, and I do not offer one this morning.*

## **THE CHANCES OF SUFFERING**

### **1. Suffering is inevitable and impartial.**

***1 Peter 2:21, 1 Peter 4:12, John 16:33, Ps 34:19, 1 Thess 3:3***

- Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you (1 Peter 4:12)
- "I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world." (John 16:33)
- Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the LORD delivers him out of them all. (Ps 34:19)
- So that no one would be disturbed by these afflictions; for you yourselves know that we have been destined for this. (1 Thess 3:3)
- "Whoever the Lord has adopted ought to prepare themselves for hard, toilsome and unquiet living." John Calvin

In spite of being familiar with these verses, we are shocked when suffering knocks on our door. We never expect it. I got a call one morning at work....Nigel..daze..white horse..fix it..cancer..aggressive...statistics..God brought me one step at a time to the place I had been all my life - totally and utterly helpless, and completely dependent upon Him. (thinking back to moments

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like that, I ask myself, "would I have allowed God to take me to that place without the experience of suffering"). God would teach us many things about Himself and about ourselves over the coming months and continues to do so.

## THE PERPLEXITY OF SUFFERING

### 2. Suffering demands answers to hard questions.

*Hab 1:3, Ps 6:3, Ps 88:14, Job 3:11, Jonah 4:4*

- **Tell me what some of these questions are...**(write on board)
- Last year I had many questions for God: Why God? Why Janice? Why are you silent? Why won't you make it go away? What have we done wrong? What do we need to do to get your attention? How can we get past this? What is the cause? What is the solution? Will it get worse? How long? What is our future? Do we have a future?
- But none of my questions were new:
  - *How long, LORD, must I call for help, but you do not listen? Or cry out to you, violence! but you do not save? Why do you make me look at injustice? Why do you tolerate wrongdoing? (Hab 1:2, 3)*
  - *Why did I not perish at birth, and die as I came from the womb? (Job 3:11)*
  - *But the LORD replied, "Is it right for you to be angry?" (Jonah 4:4)*

One thing I recognize now looking back is this:

- a. **Our questions around suffering reveal our beliefs, wrong beliefs, and unbelief, and are many times the wrong questions.**

Example 1:

- Will God send to hell those poor people in the deep dark jungles of Africa who have never heard the gospel? Would that be fair?
- Beliefs revealed: Not sure if God is fair or not. Might be a hole in God's plan of salvation. Everyone deserves a shot at heaven.
- Better question: Why does God save anyone, and certainly why me?

Example 2:

- Martin Bashir – interview with Rob Bell (regarding his book "love wins, heaven, hell and the fate of every person who ever lived" ) "Before we talk about the book, just help us with this tragedy in Japan. **Which of these is true? Either God is all powerful but doesn't care about the people of Japan, and they're suffering, or He does care about the people of Japan and but He's not all powerful? Which is it?"**
- Beliefs revealed: God cannot be all powerful and all good and allow suffering. In fact since there is suffering, God is either not all powerful or not all good.

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- Better questions: What is an all powerful and all good God's part in suffering? What is He thinking? What is He doing? In light of an all powerful and all good God, what is my right response?

As ridiculous (though clever) as Martin Bashir's question may seem to some of you, I was asking the same question last year. I felt I knew He was all powerful, so I questioned His goodness, and wondered about His interest and control over the situation.

Do we ask "Why me?" because we believe we're pretty good people and under God's care and deserving of something better than suffering? (sketch graph on white board)

- One of the more gut-wrenching, heart-breaking questions that comes from suffering is this:
  - **Where is God?** ( I asked it myself more than once last year.)
    - *My soul is in deep anguish. How long, LORD, how long? (Ps 6:3)*
    - *Why, LORD, do you reject me and hide your face from me? (Ps 88:14)*
- Ref Elie Wiesel story

**b. If we question God to know Him more, expect an amazing response.**  
**(He will always answer us, in His time, in His way. )**

- You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. (Jer 29:13)
- I love those who love me, and those who seek me find me. (Prov 8:17)
- And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him. (Heb 11:6)
- Whoever has my commands and keeps them is the one who loves me. The one who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love them **and show myself to them.** (John 14:21)

**(His answer will sometimes be "incomprehensible".)**

- *For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts. (Is 55:8-9) -(and our questions are not His questions)*
- *God thunders marvelously with His voice; He does great things which we cannot comprehend. (Job 37:5 )*
- *"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 and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen" (Rom. 11:33-36).*

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- *“Can you discover the depths of God? Can you discover the limits of the Almighty?” (Job 11:7).*
- *Who has measured the waters in the hollow of his hand, or with the breadth of his hand marked off the heavens? Who has held the dust of the earth in a basket, or weighed the mountains on the scales and the hills in a balance? <sup>13</sup> Who has understood the mind of the LORD, or instructed him as his counselor? <sup>14</sup> Whom did the LORD consult to enlighten him, and who taught him the right way? Who was it that taught him knowledge or showed him the path of understanding? <sup>15</sup> Surely the nations are like a drop in a bucket; they are regarded as dust on the scales; he weighs the islands as though they were fine dust. <sup>16</sup> Lebanon is not sufficient for altar fires, nor its animals enough for burnt offerings. <sup>17</sup> Before him all the nations are as nothing; they are regarded by him as worthless and less than nothing. (Is 40:12-17)*

**c. If we question God to know His reasoning, motives or agenda, that is to explain Himself or His ways, tread lightly, tremble and duck. (prostrate position and trembling is recommended).**

- *Guard your steps when you go to the house of God...Do not be quick with your mouth, do not be hasty in your heart to utter anything before God. God is in heaven and you are on earth, so let your words be few. (Eccl 5:1,2)*
- *Has not my hand made all these things, and so they came into being?” declares the LORD. “These are the ones I look on with favor: those who are humble and contrite in spirit, and who tremble at my word. (Is 66:2)*
- *“Who is this that obscures my plans with words without knowledge? Brace yourself like a man; I will question you, and you shall answer me. (Job 38:2)*
- *“Will the one who contends with the Almighty correct him? Let him who accuses God answer him!” “Would you discredit my justice? Would you condemn me to justify yourself? (Job 40: 2,8)*

## **THE INVOLVEMENT OF GOD IN SUFFERING**

3. God is actively involved in suffering. (more active than we might have imagined, and more active than we are probably comfortable with)

Sketch on board (spectrum) allows / permits.....causes

- Ask where class would place God in His involvement.

First clear up - **God doesn't sin or cause sin.** AND God does not delight in our suffering.

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- Your eyes are too pure to look on evil; you cannot tolerate wrongdoing. (Hab 1:13)
- He is the Rock, his works are perfect, and all his ways are just. A faithful God who does no wrong, upright and just is he. (Deut 32:3--4)
- "God from all eternity did, by the most wise and holy counsel of His own will, freely and unchangeably ordain whatsoever comes to pass; yet so, as thereby *neither is God the author of sin*, nor is violence offered to the will of the creatures, nor is the liberty or contingency of second causes taken away, but rather established." (Westminster Confession of Faith) - easier to swallow for Reformers

Nonetheless...

- Stephen Saint's dad was Nate Saint and most of you know his story, so I won't go into it in detail (google Nate Saint). Nate was an evangelical Christian missionary pilot to Ecuador, who, along with four others, was tragically killed while attempting to evangelize the Waodani people. What happened after that is even more amazing so check it out if you don't know the story. Stephen also lost his daughter Stephenie - she was home from college and complained of a headache - as he held her and prayed for her, she experienced a very sudden massive brain hemorrhage, and died later that same day in the hospital. Stephen Saint believes that God didn't just tolerate his father and daughter's deaths, or just turn away as they happened, he believes that God planned them. This testimony of his has brought reactive criticism from other Christians. He refers to Acts 2:22,23. "Fellow Israelites, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know.<sup>23</sup> This man was handed over to you by God's deliberate plan and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men,<sup>[a]</sup> put him to death by nailing him to the cross.
- For you they did what your power and will had decided beforehand should happen. (Acts 4:28)
- know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your ancestors,<sup>19</sup> but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect.<sup>20</sup> He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake. (1 Pet 1:18,19)
- Scripture seems to indicate that God ordains suffering, even the suffering of His own Son. (as John pointed out last week) - to ordain = to order or establish by appointment, decree or law (foreordain = in advance)
- Saint says that if God ordained the suffering and death of His own Son as a means to reconcile Himself with sinful man, to connect and bridge the otherwise infinite and impossible gap between us, would He not ordain our suffering and even death to continue to bring us closer to Him?
- The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away; (Job 1:20)
- Shall we accept good from God, and not trouble?" In all this, Job did not sin in what he said. (Job 2:10)
- All his brothers and sisters and everyone who had known him before came and ate with him in his house. They comforted and consoled him over all the trouble the LORD had brought on him, and each one gave him a piece of silver<sup>[a]</sup> and a gold ring. (Job 42:11)

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#### God's sovereignty and control.

- Ephesians 1:11 In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will:
- Daniel 4:35 says "And all the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing, but He does according to His will in the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of earth; and no one can ward off His hand or say to Him, 'What hast Thou done?'"
- "Look at the nations and watch— and be utterly amazed. For I am going to do something in your days that you would not believe, even if you were told. I am raising up the Babylonians, that ruthless and impetuous people, who sweep across the whole earth to seize dwellings not their own. (Hab 1: 5,6)
- LORD, are you not from everlasting? My God, my Holy One, you<sup>[G]</sup> will never die. You, LORD, have appointed them to execute judgment; you, my Rock, have ordained them to punish. (Hab 1:12)
- If we understand that God ordains suffering, and uses it for His purposes and for ultimate good (ref story of Joseph and Job), it will surely affect our attitude and response to our suffering (and to others' suffering), and even the impact of our suffering.
- (From Senior Director of Strategy of Desiring God Ministries). *But what does it mean to say that God has ordained everything that will happen? First, it means that from all eternity, God decided what would happen in His creation. Without consulting anybody else and without being limited by anything outside of himself, God has decided what will happen--from the big things down to the smallest details. This plan that God has made is, taken as a whole, exactly the way that He wants it. The second thing that is meant by the phrase "ordain" is that God acts to bring about His plan. He does not just sit back and watch his plan be fulfilled by chance. God takes action to bring about what He has planned. In sum, the truth that God has ordained whatever comes to pass means that He (1) decides what will happen and then (2) makes it happen*
- all the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be. (Ps 139:6)
- The LORD <sup>(A)</sup>has made everything for its own purpose, even the wicked for the day of evil. (Prov 16:4)
- The LORD said to him, "Who gave human beings their mouths? Who makes them deaf or mute? Who gives them sight or makes them blind? Is it not I, the LORD?" <sup>12</sup> Now go; I will help you speak and will teach you what to say." (Exod 4:11) - when Moses was trying to back out of the Exodus
- When a trumpet sounds in a city, do not the people tremble?  
When disaster comes to a city, has not the LORD caused it? (Amos 3:6)
- ""We have an idea that if we do what God wants us to do, then He owes us to take the suffering away. I believed that; I don't believe that anymore." (Steve Saint)
- I went into a rage last year, around August. A rage against Janice of all people. A rage against the staff at MD Anderson. And a rage against God. Why?
  - I thought I had done all I could - prayed, sacrificed, fasted, cried out, etc - doing what I thought God wanted me to do - why wouldn't He come through for me - and I wanted God to be impressed and grateful and to repay me. He didn't.
  - The story wasn't ending the way I wanted, and I thought my good behavior would have influenced God more. (no details - very personal for Janice)
  - God was stripping me of self-absorption, self-reliance and control for the third time. 1st time - on the way home. 2nd time, planning treatment at MD Anderson. 3rd time - by trying to impress God and manipulate Him. Would I ever reach a point of hope and trust?!
  - <sup>17</sup> He would crush me with a storm and multiply my wounds for no reason. (Job 9:17) - Job and I were having the same dumb experience.
  - Also, I was stuck between Job 41 and 42. - wanted a different response

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- James MacDonald “Never let your situation and experience define God (or alone drive your questions). Always let God (and His truthful word) define your situation and experience.” (James MacDonald)
  
- *Our sovereign, all powerful, good God is actively and personally involved in all suffering. (suffering does not happen in spite of a sovereign, all powerful, good God – it happens under and within the ordination, planning, control and direction of a sovereign, all powerful, good – and did I mention incomprehensible God)*
  
- Consider - aids, abortion, holocaust - caused by sin? harder one - tsunami - caused by sin? God's ways are not our ways, He has His own agenda - we see one thing (freak of nature, bad weather, God's judgment on Japan (Louisiana and Texas and Alabama?) and God sees the intricate workings of thousands of personal lives and stories, interwoven and moving in accordance to His sovereign will, to His glory and for good.

#### 4. God uses suffering for His purposes.

##### a. **Demonstration of Power & Validation of Deity (John 9, Luke 13)**

##### b. **Judgment & Punishment**

##### c. **Discipline**

##### d. **Refinement (Testing - 1Pet 4:12)**

*(Exodus - can be a and b)*

It's a widely accepted teaching by Christians that sin brought suffering into the world. Whether negligence / laziness, intent to harm others, intent to harm self, the gradual decay of creation, long term consequences of environmental neglect. Even accidents can somehow be traced to sin. But suffering can rarely be traced to the sin of one person, or the judgment of that person. (Jesus story about the blind man, John 9)

- And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who<sup>[a]</sup> have been called according to his purpose. (Rom 8:28)
- "And as for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive" (Genesis 50:20).
- Read Jan 9 (Streams..) about the moth (good we cannot see)...Joe & the baby dove...Rom 8:18
- **Demonstration of His power** (John 9 blind man) - perplexing - how would you feel if you were the blind man (healing, new life drowned out any inclination to complain - experienced grace he wouldn't know without suffering)
- **Judgment Punishment**
  - (1Chon 21:12) - note: God intended to make David suffer.

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- <sup>18</sup> So the LORD was very angry with Israel and removed them from his presence. Only the tribe of Judah was left, <sup>19</sup> and even Judah did not keep the commands of the LORD their God. They followed the practices Israel had introduced. <sup>20</sup> Therefore the LORD rejected all the people of Israel; he afflicted them and gave them into the hands of plunderers, until he thrust them from his presence. (2Kings 17:18-20) some would call discipline
- <sup>25</sup> When they first lived there, they did not worship the LORD; so he sent lions among them and they killed some of the people. (2 Kings 17:25)
- "After 50 years, is it not clear that God has raised up new illnesses connected with fornication? From where do these things come if not from the hand of God? [In response to these diseases] The world was astounded, and people were terrified for a time, but they have not, to this day, observed the hand of God." John Calvin
- Rev 2:20 ("Jezebel" in Thyatira church) - no repentance = sickness, suffering, death
- **Discipline and Refinement and Development of Character and Strengthening of Faith** - make us Christlike, strengthen faith, build perseverance, mold character (Job, James 1, Romans 5, 2 Cor12:7)
  - "There is no university for a Christian, like that of sorrow and trial" CH Spurgeon
  - All the children of God are destined to be conformed to Christ. The more we are afflicted with adversity, the surer we are made of our fellowship with Christ:
  - Philippians 3:10 - 10I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death
  - 2 Thessalonians 1:4-5 - 4Therefore, among God's churches we boast about your perseverance and faith in all the persecutions and trials you are enduring
  - All this is evidence that God's judgment is right, and as a result you will be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are suffering. " John Calvin - in other words, suffering, similar to fasting, is a means by which to recognize and experience our dependency upon God, and to experiencing the death of our flesh and any part of our being that comes between us and that intimate dependency, hope & trust
  - "Contrary to what might be expected, I look back on experiences that at the time seemed especially desolating and painful, with particular satisfaction. Indeed, I can say with complete truthfulness that everything I have learned in my seventy-five years in this world, everything that has truly enhanced and enlightened my existence, has been through affliction and not through happiness, whether pursued or attained. In other words, if it ever were to be possible to eliminate affliction from our earthly existence by means of some drug or other medical mumbo jumbo . . . the result would not be to make life delectable, but to make it too banal or trivial to be endurable. This of course is what the cross signifies, and it is the cross more than anything else, that has called me inexorably to Christ." Malcomb Muggeridge
  - Courage would be impossible in a world without pain (Lee Strobel). Endurance would have no value if it were not for pain. Mercy would not be experienced absence of pain and suffering.
  - Suffering provides opportunities for others to demonstrate God's love, and their love for God and others.
    - Bear one another's burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ"" (Gal 6:2).
  - Punishment, consequences of sin (Deut 29)
    - <sup>22</sup> Your children who follow you in later generations and foreigners who come from distant lands will see the calamities that have fallen on the land and the diseases

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with which the LORD has afflicted it. <sup>23</sup> The whole land will be a burning waste of salt and sulfur—nothing planted, nothing sprouting, no vegetation growing on it. It will be like the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, Admah and Zeboyim, which the LORD overthrew in fierce anger. <sup>24</sup> All the nations will ask: “Why has the LORD done this to this land? Why this fierce, burning anger?” <sup>25</sup> And the answer will be: “It is because this people abandoned the covenant of the LORD, the God of their ancestors, the covenant he made with them when he brought them out of Egypt. <sup>26</sup> They went off and worshiped other gods and bowed down to them, gods they did not know, gods he had not given them. <sup>27</sup> Therefore the LORD’s anger burned against this land, so that he brought on it all the curses written in this book. <sup>28</sup> In furious anger and in great wrath the LORD uprooted them from their land and thrust them into another land, as it is now.”

- LUKE 13: Jesus heals a woman – who didn’t express faith – said Satan caused it – He used it to prove a point, validate Himself, glorify God
  - <sup>10</sup> On a Sabbath Jesus was teaching in one of the synagogues, <sup>11</sup> and a woman was there who had been crippled by a spirit for eighteen years. She was bent over and could not straighten up at all. <sup>12</sup> When Jesus saw her, he called her forward and said to her, “Woman, you are set free from your infirmity.” <sup>13</sup> Then he put his hands on her, and immediately she straightened up and praised God. <sup>14</sup> Indignant because Jesus had healed on the Sabbath, the synagogue leader said to the people, “There are six days for work. So come and be healed on those days, not on the Sabbath.” <sup>15</sup> The Lord answered him, “You hypocrites! Doesn’t each of you on the Sabbath untie your ox or donkey from the stall and lead it out to give it water? <sup>16</sup> Then should not this woman, a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan has kept bound for eighteen long years, be set free on the Sabbath day from what bound her?”
  - Without suffering, many of us would not experience the self-denial that is commanded by Jesus.
    - "The self denial implies that we ought to give up our natural inclinations and part with our affections of the flesh and give our consent to be reduced to nothing: Matthew 16:24-25 - 24Then Jesus said to his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. 25For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it." John Calvin

Am I being punished or disciplined or refined?

- PUNISHMENT - purpose is to inflict penalty for an offense, focus is past misdeeds, attitude is retribution and justice - I don't connect this with the suffering of a believer - but sometimes people use punishment meaning discipline.
  - But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear him who, after your body has been killed, has authority to throw you into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him. (Luke 12:5)

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- (against Babylon - Isaiah 13:6, 9, 11, 15-16) – question (not rhetorical), does it say anywhere in the bible, do we have any reason to believe, that God can't, won't do this again, isn't doing this over and over?
- Therefore, there is **now no condemnation** for those who are in Christ Jesus (Rom 8:1)
- DISCIPLINE - purpose is To teach and train for correction and maturity, focus is future correct acts, attitude is love and mercy
  - Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest and repent. (Rev 3:19)
  - because the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and he chastens everyone he accepts as his son.” <sup>7</sup> Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as his children. For what children are not disciplined by their father? <sup>8</sup> If you are not disciplined—and everyone undergoes discipline—then you are not legitimate, not true sons and daughters at all. <sup>9</sup> Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of spirits and live! <sup>10</sup> They disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, in order that we may share in his holiness. <sup>11</sup> No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it. (Heb 12:6-11)
- REFINE - purpose is to make perfect, ie, Christ-like (if you let God have His way, He would constantly be refining) - different than discipline - **all are qualified**
  - But he knows the way that I take; when he has tested me, I will come forth as gold. (Job 23:10)
  - Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. (Rom 5:3,4)

Bottom line: ask God to reveal whatever comes between Him and you (Ps 139), confess daily (1John1:9) and make short accounts of sin, and finally do not avoid discipline or complain about it.

God told the Israelites to "take" their discipline and move on: <sup>4</sup> This is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says to all those I carried into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: <sup>5</sup> “Build houses and settle down; plant gardens and eat what they produce. <sup>6</sup> Marry and have sons and daughters; find wives for your sons and give your daughters in marriage, so that they too may have sons and daughters. Increase in number there; do not decrease. <sup>7</sup> Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the LORD for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper.” (Jer 29: 4-7)

*By the way....God Heals*

- *Miraculously*
  - *Through medicine (Paul > Timothy)*
  - *Through death and resurrection and eternity with Him*
- And sometimes He doesn't heal - on purpose (Paul)*

**REFER TO JONI EARICKSON TADA'S LIST OF PURPOSES OF SUFFERING.**

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5. God has an ultimate purpose for suffering.

**The ultimate purpose of suffering** (that transcends all possible reasons) is to demonstrate the glory of the grace of God.

**Review these verses, and selected quotes from Piper:**

- **Rev 13:8**
- **2 Tim 1:9**
- **Eph 1**
- **Rev 5: 9-12**

Any discussion of how pain and suffering fit into God's scheme ultimately leads back to the cross. "

— Philip Yancey

## **THE RESPONSE OF A BELIEVER TO SUFFERING**

6. To our own suffering: Seek God not a solution.

- *Be real. (humble, genuine, needy)*
- *Find your way to the end of your rope. (sooner the better)*
- *Fix your eyes and heart on God.*
- *Surrender any sense of control. (intensity, duration, outcome)*
- *Learn to wait. (Refer to Andrew Murray's book "Waiting on God")*

*Quote Andrew Murray "My soul waiteth only upon God [marg: is silent unto God]; from Him cometh my salvation." Ps. 62:1*

*If salvation indeed comes from God, and is entirely His work, just as creation was, it follows, as a matter of course, that our first and highest duty is to wait on Him to do the work that pleases Him. Waiting becomes then the only way to the experience of a full salvation, the only way, truly, to know God as the God of our salvation. All the difficulties that are brought forward as keeping us back from full salvation, have their cause in this one thing: the defective knowledge and practice of waiting upon God. All that the Church and its members need for the manifestation of the mighty power of God in the world, is the return to our true place, the place that belongs to us, both in creation and redemption, the place of absolute and unceasing dependence upon God. Let us strive to see what the elements are that make up this most blessed and needful waiting upon God: it may help us to discover the reasons why this grace is so little cultivated, and to feel how infinitely desirable it is that the Church, that we ourselves, should at any price learn its blessed secret.*

*WAITING ON GOD: PATIENTLY*

*"Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for Him, Those that wait upon the Lord, they shall inherit the land."  
Ps. 37:7, 9*

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*"In patience possess your souls." "Ye have need of patience." "Let patience have its perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire."*

*It is in waiting upon God that our eyes are opened to believe in His wise and sovereign will, and to see that the sooner and the more completely we yield absolutely to it, the more surely His blessing can come to us.*

*"It is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy." Rom 9:16. We have as little power to increase or strengthen our spiritual life, as we had to originate it. We "were born not of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of the will of God." Even so, our willing and running, our desire and effort, avail nought; all is "of God that sheweth mercy."*

*All the exercises of the spiritual life, our reading and praying, our willing and doing, have their very great value. But they can go no farther than this, that they point the way and prepare us in humility to look to and to depend alone upon God Himself, and in patience to wait His good time and mercy. The waiting is to teach us our absolute dependence upon God's mighty working, and to make us in perfect patience place ourselves at His disposal.*

*"Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for Him." The margin gives for "Rest in the Lord," "Be silent to the Lord," or R. V., "Be still before the Lord." It is resting in the Lord, in His will, His promise, His faithfulness, and His love, that makes patience easy. And the resting in Him is nothing but being silent unto Him, still before Him. Having our thoughts and wishes, our fears and hopes, hushed into calm and quiet in that great peace of God which passeth all understanding. That peace keeps the heart and mind when we are anxious for anything, because we have made our request known to Him. The rest, the silence, the stillness, and the patient waiting, all find their strength and joy in God Himself.*

*"Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for Him." Yes, for HIM. Seek not only the help, the gift, thou needest seek: HIMSELF; wait for HIM. Give God His glory by resting in Him, by trusting him fully, by waiting patiently for Him. This patience honors Him greatly; it leaves Him, as God on the throne, to do His work; it yields self wholly into His hands. It lets God be God.*

Recommend Psalm 25, 27, 33, 62

- obeying (witnessing, serving, worshipping)
  - (Steve Saint) "I do know this: sufferers want to be ministered to by people who have suffered." Janice had several friends who have had cancer over the years come to minister to her. Janice on the other hand, engaged in a ministry of prayer for those who came, one she never would have imagined. She began new friendships and renewed old ones. In one book I bought, I went straight to the chapter written by Joni Erikson Tada because of her credibility - no one would argue with Joni or say she didn't really understand suffering. (Joni) "People who suffer want people who have suffered to tell them there is hope." Joni carries the banner of hope.  
"To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps." (1 Pet 2:21)
  - easiest opportunity to share gospel you'll ever have (both Janice and I shared more than once)
    - If you have cancer, people are open to "God talk", and aren't surprised when you broach the subjects of death, etc.

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## **7. To others suffering: Be God's servant not God.**

- *Know that God is at work and that you are on holy ground.*
- *Don't outguess God (or speak for Him).*
- *Don't come between God and the sufferer.*
- *Listen and be empathetic. (cry and hurt with sufferers)*
- *Err toward silent presence. (Read Job 2:11-13)*
- *In gentleness, make God known as the opportunity arises.*
- *Pray with and for the sufferer (relationship with God, comfort, enlightenment, God's will to be done)*
- *Be available. (Serve even when not asked)*
- *Be encouraging (David - books, verses - Marilyn Breedlove - gift card, chosen ones - Tom - how to express my feeling, Mark and Sue Stewart - friends from past churches to lay hands, pour oil, get in bed with Janice, read scripture, Palmers - group prayer, countless at BridgePoint - meals and prayer)*
- *Janice: "I never went one day without someone checking in on me."*
- *do not minimize or trivialize, instead validate*

## **THE SACREDNESS OF SUFFERING**

*For some reason, I couldn't seem to find much on suffering a year ago. Now the resources and information is overwhelming. I could blame it on my deer in the headlights frame of mind. But I somehow believe that God providentially kept me from much information until I had some real life experience, and so that I could react genuinely and keep me from reacting the way a book said I should. Kind of like Job.*

*God providentially kept me from this stuff (I couldn't find anything on suffering a year ago) because He wanted me to experience and react genuinely (yuck) before I read the answer. He knows what a pretender I am.*

*You can't hurry up God. Wouldn't be a good thing. Not even by "figuring out" what He wants you to get out of it. Our timing is self serving. God's timing is perfect.*

**As believers we want and expect our life situations and circumstances to be different than those of unbelievers. As children of God, we expect to be treated differently, better, even special. God seems to instead ensure that our situations and circumstances are the same. (bless & curse who He will, rains on righteous and unrighteous - feels random, but NOT)...perhaps so that we have the**

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**opportunity to respond differently (that's what He wants the difference to be - respond differently because of who He is and our relationship with Him). Be known by our love. It's evidence of salvation, not claim to salvation.**

**First, let me ask you something: Why do you obey God? (pause)**

Do you obey Him because you understand Him to be all knowing and all powerful? Or because you believe it's the right thing to do? Or because you fear Him and His consequences? Is it possible that you are willing to obey Him on a trial basis and if it works out, you will obey Him more consistently and perhaps even grow to trust Him? And when we suffer, do we count this against God and move Him down a notch on the trust scale? How powerful, how life-changing, would it be if we obeyed God because **we absolutely and unshakenly trust Him?**

(Ref Jerry Bridges: Trusting God, Even When Life Hurts)

**Here's where God has grown me the most this last year. To trust Him. He shined a great light on me and put me in front of a mirror and what I saw was trust that was conditional, trust that wavered, trust that faltered in the face of a hard circumstance. When there's nothing else left of self-sufficiency, and of worldly resources...you must trust God as He is your only hope. (Joe)**

**one of the biggest changes for me - i am now free to obey God because I trust Him and Him alone.**

8. Suffering is a unique place designed by God, by which we may encounter and experience Him as He intends.
9. In regard to suffering, God has given us enough insight and evidence to know that we can trust Him, enough comfort and confidence to make us want to trust Him, yet left enough unexplained and unexplainable to require us to decide whether or not to trust Him.

**God knows when you are suffering. He cares deeply and does not delight in your suffering. He is in absolute control of every detail. He would but have you to fix your eyes on Him, and to persevere in waiting, trusting, hoping. He is trustworthy, especially in your suffering. You can trust Him.**

## EVERYTHING IS SACRED....ESPECIALLY SUFFERING

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#### Resources

- Suffering and the Sovereignty of God (John Piper / Justin Taylor)
- A Lifetime of Wisdom: Embracing the Way God Heals You (Joni Eareckson Tada)
- Waiting on God (Andrew Murray)
- A Grace Disguised: How the Soul Grows through Loss (Jerry Sittser)
- The Problem of Pain (C.S. Lewis)
- Job (God)
- Genesis 37-50 .....The Story of Joseph (God)
- Streams in the Desert (L.B. Cowman)

#### Questions for you

- Is life fair? Is God fair? Is fair what we really want?
- What questions do you still have about suffering? Are they the right questions? What are the beliefs behind your questions?
- Do we deserve a comfortable, pain free, prosperous, happy life?
- What questions are you asking that are the wrong questions? What might be better questions?
- What good have you ever seen come from suffering?
- Can you trust God when He is silent? When you don't understand Him and He seemingly won't explain Himself? When your life is hard and not going as expected? When you are hurting and can't do anything about it?