

Suffering

The question is not “Why?” but “How?”

Part One: I Don’t Know

Our view of God will influence the way we respond to suffering.

Introduction to the series: Bring tissue every week. Biblical focus—Genesis, Job, Psalms, Lamentations, 1 Peter, “suffering threads.” Discuss hard issues without crass references, profane language, or grotesque images. We will follow the lead of God’s Word: teaching will be startling, difficult, and specific. Each week, a list of questions will prompt discussion. Please wait to ask questions until the end of the teaching.

Introduction to Sovereignty and Providence

1. God is Sovereign. He controls all events. He is actively involved with all people, places, and events (Genesis 50:20; Daniel 2:20-23; James 4:13-15). There are no accidents or coincidences. Not luck, nor destiny, nor chance, nor fates, contribute to any earthly event (Matthew 6:25-34; 10:26-33; John 1:12-13; Acts 2:22-24; 4:27-28; 17:24-28).
2. The Providence of God. God personally plans and oversees all the affairs of men. Nothing happens outside of God's design or purpose. All things are done for God's glory. The rise and fall of rulers and nations is ordained by God. The personal, eternal Creator is in control of the smallest detail to the greatest event. Though the flow of history may sometimes be a human mystery, all events are Sovereignly interrelated. [Isa 44-46; Dan 1-6; Rom 8, 9; Eph 1]

Five Pictures:

1. Airplane: which wing do you want to fall off? Example: Acts 2
2. Tapestry: there are two sides to beauty. Example: Job 1, 2
3. Tension: both ideas are true at the same time. Example: Acts 14
4. Circles: one small, inside one large. Example: Prov 16
5. Umbrella: all people, places, events. Example: Acts 17

Five Issues:

1. The great question: “Why does God allow bad things to happen to good people?”
2. The great problem: It all begins with us
3. The great definition: “allow,” “bad things,” “good people”
4. The great contrast: “I control my own destiny”
5. The great response: “What must I know-be-do because of what I have learned?”

Five Applications:

1. The best time to teach sovereignty is *before* humanly bad things happen.
2. There is not necessarily a correlation between wrongs committed and pain we experience.
3. There is not necessarily a correlation between doing right and rewards.
4. Answers to the “why” questions are not our domain. God controls the mysteries of life. There are no explanations for suffering; we should not expect any.
5. We should never doubt God’s presence in suffering. He is with us in it. And for our pagan friends who wonder, “Where is God when bad things happen?” we must ask them, “Where is your praise for God for all the good things that happen to you?”

Five Questions:

1. What beliefs do we bring to the discussion of sovereignty and how are our views colored by definitions, events, people, or situations of the past?

How is our view of God and the world shaped by where we live, during what period we live in
2. History, and how we live in our socio-economic position?
3. Would our view of God change were we Hispanic? African-American? Churched? Unchurched? Rich? Poor? Urban? Rural? Living in the 18th, 19th, 20th century? Industrialized or Third World Country? Living in Communist China? USA?
4. Is there any sense of human pride (“Pull up my own boot straps”) that is inhibiting a proper perspective on suffering?
5. Do we have to have all the answers to difficult questions? Are we reticent to let go of unsubstantiated or uninvestigated positions, presuppositions, or perspectives?

Further Definitions

God is eternal. The temporal, finite world exists because there is One who is “from everlasting to everlasting” (Psalm 90:1-2), whose “dominion is eternal” (Daniel 4:34, 35), and whose work within time benefits humanity (Psalm 31:15; 39:4-7).

God is creator. All things, including time, were made by and for Himself (Genesis 1:1; Romans 11:33-36; Colossians 1:15-17). As Creator, His Lordship reigns, His ownership rules (Leviticus 25:23; Psalm 50:9-12).

God foreordains. The plan of God for His world was “declared from the distant past” (Isaiah 45:21; 46:9-11; Ephesians 1:9-11).

History begins in eternity God is the author of history. God created all matter, space, and time, but God does not wear a watch. He is not bound by time (cf. 2 Peter 3:8) since He is outside of and apart from time but God has chosen to work within time to accomplish His plan. Jesus is the central person in God’s plan and human history. Only He can, by His coming in the form of a man, bridge the gap between God’s eternal kingdom and the temporal world (cf. Isaiah 9:6-7; Galatians 4:4-5). When studying history, we must frame our understanding of people, places, and events in the grand narrative of God’s plan to make it meaningful. Apart from God, history is a meaningless record of man’s vanity. [Genesis 1:1; Ecclesiastes 3:10-11; Daniel 4:34-35; John 17:5, 24; Ephesians 1:9-10; Hebrews 1:1-2; Revelation 22:1-7.]

- “We may know little, but the little that we do know is more valid for our interpretation of the world than the much that we do not know.” --Albertus Pieters

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Part Two: Embracing Pain

We need to replace our faulty assumptions about injustice in this life.

Joni Eareckson Tada *A Step Further*. Ruth Davies—on the other side of the bars-- “I’m used to dealing with offenders. They all have victims too. I don’t often think about that.” Melissa Schuster “I want to see him put away . . . God has a purpose for me.”¹

Outraged by Suffering. Review of Job 1, 2 last week. There is NOT a one-for-one right living therefore reward absolute. There is NOT a one-for-one wrong living therefore justice absolute.

Psalms 73. Vv. 1-3 Believing While Suffering; “pure” = a total commitment to God; But “my feet had almost slipped; Loving both the honesty & repentance. Vv. 4-12 Accepting Temporal Injustices. Vv. 13-17 Seeing Eternal Endings; “until I understood their final destiny.” Vv. 18-28 Accepting God’s Purposes; “in the end”; Faithful through suffering.

Sidebar: Why does God allow the wicked to prosper? God allows the wicked to prosper so they have no excuse (Job 27.7-23; Proverbs 14.11-12). Be wary! Do not wish for your enemy to “get his!” Proverbs 24.17, 18. “Do not rejoice when your enemy falls & let your heart be glad when he stumbles lest the Lord...turn His anger away”

Embracing Pain: The Hebrew Way. Talking to ourselves vs. listening to ourselves. Pro-active, pro-application approach to pain. “Spiritual living is to know how to handle yourself. You have to take yourself in hand, you have to address yourself, preach to yourself, question yourself. You must say to your soul: ‘Why art thou cast down’-what business have you to be disquieted?” Martin Lloyd-Jones *Spiritual Depression*

Our Wrong Assumptions

1. We expect one-for-one justice; if this happened then this... Mal 2.11 “Where is God’s justice?”
2. We expect in-time justice, a “credit card swipe” mentality that all transactions should occur instantly (1 Timothy 5.25-26 “some consequences are immediate, others follow later”)
3. The righteous should not suffer; the wicked should not prosper. (Habakkuk)
4. Our view of justice is perfect; we see no exceptions to the rules. (Isaiah 55.9-11 “My ways are not your ways declares YHWH”)
5. “Goodness” is as we define it. If we do not see our kind of “goodness” then God is not good. (“God is good to Israel” Ps 73.1)

We should be careful NOT to off-handedly say “this is a God-thing” or when humanly good things happen we should NOT say “God is good” unless we are willing to say the same phrase during pain.

6. God is absent if I have to wait; out-of-sight, out-of-mind. (“How long O Lord” 4x Psalm 13.1-2)

¹ <http://www.chicagotribune.com/suburbs/burr-ridge/news/ct-dbr-willowbrook-victim-speaks-20150904-story.html>

Words We should Embrace At the Same Time

- Earth's View, Heaven's View
- Ambiguity with Precision
- Mystery with Finality
- Uncertainty with Certitude
- Obscurity with Clarity
- Doubt with Assurance

Applications

1. Resolution to pain and suffering may not come the way we want, in the time we want, to the people we want.
2. A proper view of suffering suggests that the answer to pain will not be satisfied by welfare, government programs, warfare, or the judicial system.
3. Protesting our pain before God is a godly position. [More in coming weeks.]
4. We hold the hands of the victim AND the offender. It is NOT an either or proposition.
5. If there is a beginning there will always be an end. If there is doubt, there is hope. If there is darkness, there is light. If there is pain, there is release. If there is heartache, there is joy. If there is a creation, there is a second coming. If there is a cross, there is an empty grave. If despair, delight. If mystery, it has an Author.

"I'm glad we live close to the prison. I'm there a lot."

"Have you met Frankie?"

Questions

1. When you hear a stories like those I told today, what are your thoughts about God?
2. How would you respond personally to a neighbor or someone else close to you who has endured such an experience?
3. How do we talk through suffering with others? How do we actively talk through suffering with ourselves?
4. Are we listening to God while we wait for Him to act?
5. What false assumptions do I bring to suffering?

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Part Three: Curse My Birthday

I focus on the pain, the only thing that's real. “Hurt,” Johnny Cash

“Evangelical Christian music is too happy. It does not reflect the realities of life. That’s why I like ‘the blues.’ That’s why I like the Psalms. The Psalms are ‘the blues’ of the Old Testament.” Bono, U2

Bono and Cash have it right. We understand Job 3 is about us—we all suffer, hurt. Everyone wishes they could just turn back time, declare a mulligan, or cry for a child’s game “do over.” Pregnant metaphors, pulsating with profound passion and pain, wed our grief with Job 3: it is personal, vivid, honest, and bold. We may not comprehend each other’s specific grief. What we can say is we have all experienced some of what Job is saying in chapter three. This week and next Job 3 will speak for itself. Interpretation will lead to application leading to lamentation.

Job’s lament begins as a curse from the womb, an anti-birthday-birthday. “May, may, may” mark verses 1-10, the wish, the longing for something, anything other than what he must endure. When Job “curses” the Hebrew word marks a formula; Job curses or removes the blessing from his birth. Celebration is now rejection. It might be as if one lover says to the other, “I wish I’d never met you!” Once the day was cause for joy; the next, cause for a curse. Job goes so far as to call out the sorcerers, the spiritists to curse the day, to reverse the spell. If it’s possible, do it. Because such an incantation is impossible it shows the acuteness of Job’s agony, his misery (v 8).

Job is spewing out his cries of rage through this Hebrew poetry. Hebrew parallelism runs through the whole chapter. Job’s cries come in two forms: synthetic parallelism—saying the same thing in a similar way—amplifies Job’s grief (v 11) and synonymous parallelism—stacking one negative concept on top of another—adds insult to injury (v 5). In sports we say “Let’s take it to the next level!” In literature, “The author is building toward a climax.” Musicians refer to this intensity in their scores as a *crescendo*, from *piano* (meaning “softly”) to *fortissimo* (meaning “very loud”). In mathematical terms we express exponential growth in terms of “rising powers”: ten to the second power, ten to the third power, ten to the fourth power, etc. “Compound interest,” is money accrued or growing in a bank account. All the parallels in the poetic lament give this sense of intensification.

Job’s “birthday” was his “death-day,” an awful day, an awful event, one he wished had never happened. “May” or “let” is repeated in English word or understanding multiple times in verses 3 through 10. Job is recalling something in his past, thinking about it in the future, we would call this a “retrospective”—contemplating or surveying the past. For Job, this retrospective is anything but a smiling muse of past events. The retrospective for Job means “When you think about my beginning, my birth, the night I was conceived, curse it; reverse the celebration of it!” Job wants to cancel not only his birth but the triumph of the man who knows he has produced offspring (v. 3).

The Silent Scream Edvard Munch was torn. His dad had just died. He lacked his father's faith in God. Reflecting later on his bohemian friends and their embrace of free love, he wrote: "God—and everything was overthrown—everyone raging in a wild, deranged dance of life....But I could not set myself free from my fear of life and thoughts of eternal life."

Job wishes he had never been born. “Curse the day!” The only way to do this is to wipe his birthday off the calendar. As long as his day of birth is repeated or recreated every year his existence continues until death. He

wants it removed, gone. Not only is Job “anti-birthday” he is “anti-Creation.” Job wants “that day—let it be darkness” (v. 4). This is the direct opposite of God’s first words in creation “Let there be light” (Gen 1.3). God began with light and ended resting. Job begins by calling for darkness and ends in verse 13 by saying, “If darkness had blotted out his birthday—if he had never existed—he would be at rest.” The words he uses in verses 4-6 confirm his pain: darkness, deep dark (a darkness so thick you can’t see your hand in front of your face), cloud mass (a covering so dense it blocks out the sun), blackness (a fog so intense that it hides the sun). He wants rest so badly that he uses four separate Hebrew words: he wants to lie down, be quiet, sleep, and rest. To the person in pain, birth equals trouble (v. 10): the agony or misery of extreme hardship is cruel and fatiguing.

Job is in the deep throes of outrageous pain, wailing and moaning. If we saw someone like this we would probably say, “They’re beside themselves! I’ve never seen them like this before!” This is Job’s state as he curses or removes the celebration of his birth. It does not mean that Job has lost control. Job is expressing the deepest, rawest of emotions a person can express. There is no shame or sin here, only humanness. If we read the Lamentations of Jeremiah the weeping prophet or Jesus’ own wrenching turmoil in Gethsemane prior to His crucifixion we would see the same imprint of humanity. In fact, James 5:11 lauds Job for endurance, the meaning of the word “patience.”

We need be careful of our response to believing people when they gush honest, profound, anguished cries, when hurt is too great to bear. Angry honesty from a Christian sometimes shocks us. I think this is because we live in a culture of “niceness”—critical or caustic responses are met with repudiation. Given the responses of Job’s three friends throughout the book, we sometimes misapply our theology either with trite, bumper sticker slogans that hurt more than help or we condemn the person who is in pain for expressing their pain. The best response to anyone in pain is to do as Paul commanded: “weep with those who weep.” Our futile attempts to interpret or explain another’s suffering is to fall into the trap of Job’s three friends. To listen, to be attentive is exactly the right response.

1. *Job’s suffering had probably gone on for some months.* People ask “Why?” but more often “How long??!!”
2. *Lament is honest to who we are as humans:* to the raw, rasping recoiled reaction to wrong when it happens to us.
3. *There is no human answer to the mysteries of suffering.* “Theodicy” is an attempt to justify the ways of God to men. But in Job we have “anti-theodicy”—unjustifiable suffering takes place in the world: period.
4. We sometimes misapply our theology either with trite, bumper sticker slogans that hurt more than help or we condemn the person who is in pain for expressing their pain.
5. The best response to anyone in pain is to do as Paul commanded: “weep with those who weep.” Our futile attempts to interpret or explain another’s suffering is to fall into the trap of Job’s three friends. To listen, to be attentive is exactly the right response.

Five things NOT to do during times of calamity:

1. Don’t compare: when someone tells you of their pain, do not bring up yours
2. Don’t complain: do not suggest to someone who has just lost everything that you lost anything
3. Don’t answer: folks want to vent and rage; your reply should be silence
4. Don’t leave: nothing replaces physical presence
5. Don’t critique: people cry, scream, swear, drink, smoke; be sensitive, ditch your sensitivities

In the Coen brother’s film *O Brother, Where Art Thou?* one song provides the underlying refrain: “I’m a Man of Constant Sorrow.” This is Job’s song, the lament of Job 3:1-10. Johnny Cash knew it. Bono knows it. And if we’re honest, we know it too. Caring for others means we must engage the deepest, darkest depths of despair.

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Part Four: I Just Want to Die

“There ought to be no sorrow, but there is sorrow, and we have to accept and receive ourselves **in the fires of sorrow**,” J. Oswald Sanders, June 25th, *My Utmost for His Highest*

“Grief has no distance. Grief comes in waves, sudden apprehensions, weakening knees, **obliterating the dailiness of life**.” Joan Didion, *The Year of Magical Thinking*

“Life is hard. Then you die. Then they throw dirt in your face. Then the worms eat you. Be grateful it happens in that order.”

David Gerrold, science fiction writer, “The Trouble with Tribbles,” *Star Trek*

Review of Job 3.1-10 from last week: lament, parallelism, outline

Lament: Screaming, Wailing, Moaning

- (1) *No where in Scripture does “joy” equal “happiness,” “hilarity,” or a “release” from pain.*
- (2) *“Lament” is a whole form of writing in Scripture, unfortunately overlooked or ignored by Christians.*
- (3) *Lament does not seek to explain pain. Scripture gives voice to human anguish, rage and despair. God can take it. Psalm 12:1-2; Psalm 31:9-12; Psalm 42:1-3; Psalm 77:1-2, 7-9; Psalm 88; Psalm 94:3-7*

Pistons explode from shoulder to fist to face. In a boxing bout the word “jabs” describes one opponent snapping his adversary’s head back with each blow. This is Job 3.11-26. Job then picks up an automatic pistol, firing controlled bursts of bullets expressing the subject of his agony. Every single line and each nuance of meaning in the Hebrew throughout this chapter depicts the ferocity of blows and bullets. The power of this gut wrenching groan that reaches a roar at the end of the poem is not done justice in English. A taste of these compact attacks is summarized by verse eleven’s seven word-Hebrew-line: “Why not die birth womb came expire?!”

A crescendo of impending doom pounds throughout the first half of the poem. Verses 11 and 12 refer to the event Job wishes had never happened in verses 3-10—his birth. Placed on his father’s knees (a sign legitimizing the birth father) and at his mother’s breast to feed, now his awful life commences. Verses 1-10 repeat the idea of “may this never be!” and verses 11-26 repeat “Why did this happen in the first place?!” Verses 1-10 repeat “May...may...may” verses 11-26 repeat “Why? Why? Why?”

Job “piles on” the words for death: death will be a repose, an anticipated rest, lying down, be at peace, tranquility, what we call “the big sleep” or “the long dirt nap.” Death is better than life because life is full of trouble. The list, the catalog, the pile that Job creates has but one idea: *life is nothing but trouble, in every way, for everyone.* Pick a social strata, they are all represented here: the powerful, rich, leaders, wicked, the weary, slaves, forced laborers, prisoners, the small (underprivileged) and the great (the privileged). Right in the middle of this grouping is what Job would have wished for originally—to be stillborn, dead at birth.

Verse 19 is a final resting place for death. In the Hebrew, there are no verbs present. Instead of reading, “Small and great are there,” rather we should read “Small and great there, dead, no more activity.” Every positive statement is about being dead: “the weary are at rest,” “captives enjoy their ease,” “slave freed,” and there is “gladness in reaching the grave.”

Why is death best? Because it releases us from life's miseries. All the things we build during our lifetime will be ruined. All the money we accumulate, gone. All the work we do, useless activity. Our position and place in life, gone. Before Kregel's bookstore in Grand Rapids was sold, I loved to wander through the stacks. Most of Kregel's inventory was located in a huge basement. The smell of old books as I searched for various titles is etched in my memory. But it struck me one day: most of the men who have written these books are dead. These are dead men's books. It reminded me of my own demise. What we produce on this earth is literally "here today and gone tomorrow."

Can we count on what believers refer to as "God's hedge of protection"? Notice that the hedge of protection Satan thought God offered to Job in 1:10 is now thought by Job to be God's trap 3:23. When he says "man's way is hidden" in 3:23 he refers to life being without purpose. He has lost all sense of meaning because of all his losses. Verses 24-26 are very hard Hebrew. But a few ideas stand out: (1) "sighing" and "groaning" are too soft. The words are used for "roaring lions" in other passages. (2) The very thing Job dreaded (the loss of God's favor in 1:5) has happened. (3) The final lines come back to my comments about head-snapping jabs at the beginning of this section. It's as if Job is spitting out the words, disgusted, he can't wait to get them out of his mouth. "I have no peace, I have no quiet, I have no rest; Enter trouble." Remember what he said in verse 13 he repeats here—he wants tranquility, serenity, to enjoy life. But all these words for rest suggest he has physical turmoil, mental anguish, and social discomfort. All he has is "trouble"—the word for agitation without peace.

Application: Physical, Emotional, Financial Abuse

Living in a AAA household. My father was an adulterous-abusive-alcoholic. When my father was drunk, which was every night after 5 p.m., you walked an emotional tightrope. The anger and rage was awful. Abuse takes many forms in the home, including physical and emotional abuse. "Living in the air of abuse" never knowing when the next emotional discharge would erupt. Knowing when I went back home I would know that this thing. "What you can see is different than the toll it took on a person." What would you like fathers, mothers, children, churches, pastors, and community leaders to take away from your comments this evening?

Five Things TO DO:

1. **Shut up:** *Keep your pious platitudes to yourself*
2. **Show up:** *Be with people who are hurting today, next week, next month, next year.*
3. **Pay up:** *Take out your wallet and pay the tab, don't think about it, just do it*
4. **Stay up:** *Friend in pain can't sleep, neither should you, darkness in the dark is double hard*
5. **Keep up:** *Lose your schedule, routine, and expectations; your friends in crisis just lost theirs*

- *When we honestly ask ourselves which persons in our lives means the most to us, we often find that it is those who, instead of giving advice, solutions, or cures, have chosen rather to share our pain and touch our wounds with a warm and tender hand. Henri Nouwen Out of Solitude*
- *If our theology does not soften our hearts toward people, our theology will only harden our hearts toward God.*

Questions to Consider

1. *Who do we know that is suffering and how will we help?*
2. *What do we know of pain and how does it impact our relationships?*
3. *Why should we have a "theology of suffering?"*
4. *How should government policy, business practice, or church polity help those who suffer?*
5. *When people question my hope in the biblical record of Jesus, my question is, "What is your alternative? Where do you place your hope?"*

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Part Five: When We Have No One to Blame but Ourselves

“The sins of some people are conspicuous, going before them to judgment, but the sins of others appear later.” (1 Tim 5.24-25)

James M. Cain always said that most of his books were about the horror of “the wish that comes true.” His characters go to ferocious lengths to obtain something, usually involving some combination of sex, money, and violence, only to find they can’t stand to live with the very thing they doggedly pursued. Cain invariably depicted lust and murder arising out of the same bellowing furnace chamber of the self. (Andy Lamey, “Raising Cain,” *Toro*, June/July, 2003, p. 49.)

1. This is a warning for the future (v. 14, "But if...")

It hasn't happened yet. But it will. We normally attempt to bypass responsibility by saying, "I didn't know!" even when we actually did! To have been given God's revelation and ignore it, is worse than not to have had His Word in the first place (Matthew 11:20-24). How can we look in the mirror of God's Word (James 1:19-25), see its ethical reflection and turn away to do the opposite?

2. The reasons for sin's consequences include rejection of God, violation of His laws, and open hostility toward God's intentions.

- v. 14 "they will not listen, will not carry out"
- v. 15 "they reject my decrees, abhor my laws"
- v. 19 "they have stubborn pride"
- v. 21 "they are hostile toward God and refuse to listen"
- v. 23 "they continue in their hostility"

Do we ever practice "in your face" disobedience? Do we ever ask, "Why should I listen to you?!" Do we ever say, "I could care less what you say!" Our best efforts are in vain when we harbor unrepented sin (vv. 18-20).

3. Other people are used by God to discipline us.

- v. 16 "your enemies" v. 17 "those you hate will prosper"
- To see those we don't like benefit from our discipline is worse than the discipline!

4. Continued disregard for sin's consequences increases our distress

- v. 18 "If after all this..." v. 21 "If you remain hostile..."
 - v. 23 "if in spite of these things..." v. 27 "If...you continue hostility..."
- This happens when we disregard warnings—someone saying, "Look out!"

5. The normal, accepted ebb and flow of life will be interrupted.

- v. 16 "cause your way of life to waste away"

Is the pleasure of the moment worth the many of pain, discomfort and shame?

6. Unconfessed sin causes us to wonder when the other shoe will drop

v. 17 "you will flee even when no one is pursuing"

v. 36-37 "the sound of a windblown leaf will put them to flight"

Do we enjoy...anticipating the worst?...the late night phone call?...being discovered or found out?

7. God takes an active role in the discipline of His children.

v. 16 "I will punish" v. 17 "I will turn against you" v. 18 "I will increase your punishment" v. 28 "my anger will turn on you"

We often forget that God hates, becomes angry, and will judge. However, God never forgets His promise: "I will not completely abandon them or destroy them. That would put an end to the covenant with them and I am the Lord their God" (26:44)

8. The consequences of sin continue from one generation to another.

vv. 39-40 "Because of their sins and their father's sins..."

We not only reap the effects of sin, but may assume and extend the sin of our ancestors.

9. Learn from the consequences of others' sins.

vv. 40-41 "the sin of your ancestors"

Why is it that we do not want to listen to the advice of others, especially those who are older? Why do we say, "It'll be different for me!"?

10. Even after repentance the consequences of sin continue

vv 40-43, "the full penalty for having rejected my laws and my commands"

Once the pendulum begins to swing it takes a while to stop. People may still "hold it against us". It takes years to regain a reputation lost.

Applications

1. Rebellion: "but if you do not obey me"
2. Recalcitrance: "but if you continue"
3. Ratcheting: "but if you do not listen, 7x more"
4. Refusal: "but if, but if, but if," a series of five
5. Remediation: intention of discipline
6. Remaining "hostile" (only in Lev 26: 21, 23, 24, 27, 28, 40, 41) = "to walk out of step" (Gal 5)
7. Rituals will not save (26.41-42)
8. Ripples → next generations
9. Repentance → Reprieve
10. Remembrance → Restoration (Rom 11.1)

Questions

1. What sin can we stop doing right now?
2. How do we "keep in step with The Spirit" (Galatians 5.25)
3. Why are generational consequences so hard to stop?
4. Whose life example should stand as a warning to me?
5. How do I internalize God's Word leading to repentance and restoration?

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Part Six: Suffering the Consequences

Even when we are undone, God is not done with us.

- What do we do with the knowledge that innocents suffer through no fault of their own?
- Leviticus 26.39; Deuteronomy 28.32, 46
- Sovereignty is easy to teach, hard to live. Protest to God assumes God's sovereignty, His goodness. Protest does not deny sovereignty.

"[God is] often more conspicuous by his absence than by his presence, and his absence is much of what we labor under and are heavy laden by." -Frederick Buechner

Lamentations: God does not speak.

- "Where ARE You?!!!"
- 5x in chapter one "no one to comfort"; 5x in chapter one "groaning"
 - 16x in chapter one "all"; —totality of suffering
- The silence of God as a response to sin should not be a surprise. If we have not listened to Him before why should He listen to us now?
 - We do NOT speak for God
 - We should NOT offer triteness
 - We should NOT be quick to offer happy endings
 - We SHOULD emphasize the honesty of Scripture: God wants the rawness of human experience in His Book

Lamentations: Stuck in the Middle with You

- ✦ Alphabetic, acrostic poem (A, B, C...)
- ✦ 1/2 3 4/5
- ✦ ABABAB
- ✦ AAABBBAAABBB
- ✦ Pain impacts every aspect of life; Eating to suppress pain
- ✦ "Great is Thy faithfulness" (3.23) is preceded by "He has made my teeth grind on gravel, and made me cower in ashes; my soul is bereft of peace; I have forgotten what happiness is; so I say, "My endurance has perished, so has my hope from the Lord" (3.16-18). The problem with some Scripture hymns . . .

"There is certainly nourishing faith and hope at the heart of the book, but we arrive at it and depart from it along roads of intense pain. We trivialize that pain if we set it all to one side and dig out only the hope at the centre. If we do that, we merely collude with those who pass by (Lam 1.12)"
- Christopher J. H. Wright

The Historical-Cultural Background of Lamentations

- For hundreds of years through the words of a dozen prophets God warned His people that their sin would warrant consequences
- "We" as a prominent, prophetic pronoun

If it's been a while since we've read the book . . .

- ✳ Lamentations expresses some of the most outrageous, total response to pain I've ever read in Scripture
- ✳ I'm personally glad it's there . . .
- ✳ "My God, my God why have You forsaken me..." (Ps 22)
- ✳ Lamentations fits into all Scripture...
- ✳ Grief & rage are seen within The Story

"War is Hell" and Other Truths

- Centuries of anti-Semitism; *never forget* that the Jewish people are God's people
- Centuries of anti-Christianity; *never forget* our brothers & sisters savaged in other countries
- Horrors of war on the littlest ones; torture, starvation, and cannibalism (2.20-22)
- Prayers of outrage; Lamentations is full of them
- Lamentations would be just another outcry; if there is no God we spit into the wind (3.22ff)

Jeremiah & Lamentations: The Differences

- Jeremiah anticipates a return to the promised land
- Lamentations anticipates nothing: the city is sieged and conquered
- Jeremiah writes to Hebrews in exile awaiting return to the land
- Lamentations writes about Hebrews who are survivors left in Jerusalem

Historical, Cultural Foreground to Lamentations

- Jeremiah 29.4-7
- "Shalom" = peace which means Completion, fulfillment, wholeness
- "Peace pulls the pieces together" Colossians 1.20
- A cancelled wedding . . .

Applications

1. I do not need to pile on but sit down with those who suffer, even if they deserve it.
2. I do not need to blame the victim. "What did you do?" solves nothing. (widow=city)
3. I need to allow people to vent their rage, vocalize the anguish, despair.
4. God is not done with us even when we are undone.
5. I need to understand God if I'm going to understand suffering. God's discipline of sin displays God's faithfulness to His people.
6. Do we participate in the suffering of others during their lamentation by "walking on by?" (1.12)
7. People who suffer because of their own sin do not question the discipline but the length and severity of the discipline (1.18, 4.9)
8. Yes, blame & consequence exist. But when suffering happens "Why?" should disappear.
9. Finding fault in suffering is not our place. "Good enough for 'em!" or to glory in those caught in Ashley Madison disclosures only shows our hardness of heart.
10. Like Bonhoeffer, stand with the innocents, with those who suffer.

Questions

1. How do we respond to God's silence?
2. Do we only pick out verses or books in the Bible that fit our perspectives? Do we study the whole of Scripture?
3. Do we care about others' suffering as much as we do our own?
4. Do we understand that sin has consequences which harm innocents?
5. For what reasons do I become outraged? Do I only pick the sins or consequences that fit my biases?

Suffering

The question is not “Why?” but “How?”

Part Seven: Chaos—Running Toward the Pain

“Seek good and not evil . . . Hate evil, and love good” (Amos 5.14-15)

If you are neutral in situations of injustice, you have chosen the side of the oppressor. **Desmond Tutu**

The world is not dangerous because of those who do harm,

but because of those who look at it without doing anything. **Albert Einstein**

To sin by silence when they should protest makes cowards of men. **Abraham Lincoln**

All that is required for evil to triumph is for good men to do nothing. **Edmund Burke**

The New York Times should publish two contents side-by-side: 12 million Syrian refugees need shelter!
The megalomaniac dictator responsible for 12 million Syrian refugees needs to be stopped!

“Broken cities need those minor leaders who cultivate, in their own corners, a community’s moral formation.” Matthew Loftus, *Running Toward the Pain*, Comment, May, 2015

Amos: God speaks to All Nations, Holding His Nation to the Higher Standard

Geographic concentric circles of judgment ending with Israel. The northern kingdom of Israel had -0- good kings. Their fall came sooner (722 B.C.) than that of the southern kingdom of Judah (587-86 B.C.) which had -8- good kings. The universal principles of leadership matter everywhere.

Historical, Cultural Foreground to Amos

Israel’s Problem in Amos (2 Kings 14.23-27):

Economic Prosperity, Political Autonomy, Military Security

Applications First responders to chaos, running toward the pain means:

1. If we see evil and turn away, we have only become part of the evil.
2. **Building relationships** with others opens the door to discuss pain.
3. Strengthening small group, grass-roots institutions is where the battle against chaos begins.
4. **We do not allow anyone’s pain to be “censored,”** left out of public view.
5. When we silence others through “shaming” their ideas, perspectives, or approaches we help continue the pain.
6. **Persuading others to respond** to others’ pain demands the voice of the powerful, the privileged, and the well positioned.
7. Teach by doing, by being there means we have earned the right to be heard by participating in the pain.
8. **We do not vilify those who stand for another’s pain**, even if we disagree with the cause, because pain and chaos are everywhere.
9. We are committing to a way of helping. Give it your all. Stick to it. Don’t blame others who don’t care for our focus as we do. They have their own focus.
10. **We can only know-be-do so much.** The horrors of our world go viral. We cry out to God knowing we cannot attend to every horror. But we push back the pain in our chosen chaos.

“...To love the little platoon we belong to in society, is the first principle of public affections. It is the first link in the series by which we proceed towards a love to our country, and to mankind. The interest of that portion of social arrangement is **a trust in the hands of all those who compose it...**”

Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the French Revolution*, ¶ 75

Questions

1. **Protecting** those whose lives are in danger.
2. **Attending** to the needs of others in pain.
3. **Defending** those who cannot defend themselves.
4. **Speaking out** against the brutality of bullies in the world.
5. **Shining** a light in the darkness.
6. **Running toward** the violence when the alarms are sounded.

Imprecatory Principles in Scripture Key to understanding violence and justice in Scripture are the imprecatory Psalms. The songs of Psalms 109 or 137, for example, include prayers for the punishment of God’s enemies. Calling down judgment on adversaries is both a very human and very troubling response to evil this side of heaven. Bearing the image of God—His character including justice—we desire justice. Invoking curses on others seems to be a difficult proposition in an age of tolerance and for Christians who are called to love their neighbor. Since Scripture calls for justice in this life, I offer my "dirty dozen" responses to believers’ cries for justice now.

1. As poetry, the Psalms express emotion in poetic fashion. Personification, hyperbole, etc., are normal but hyperbolic responses to actual desires is normal in ancient Near Eastern expression.

2. As reality, the Psalms are expressions of humans in crisis, responding to injustice, cruelty, oppression, slander, betrayal, conspiracy, personal distress, etc.

3. As anticipation, if there is no justice after life, there can be no justice in this life. Short-term versus long-term response to injustice.

4. As severity, the Psalms express feelings beyond what many Westerners would consider "normal" in the 21st century.

5. As misery, the Psalms are expressions of serious rage, anger, grief, and fury against evildoers.

6. As parity, the Psalms are expressions of fairness, impartiality, and even-handedness based on God’s righteousness.

7. As right, indignation is a proper, personal response to injustice. The only possible redemption available is the pure, unadulterated innocence of Jesus’ sacrifice.

8. As loyalty, the Psalms are expressions of a theocratic commitment to the Suzerain-vassal treaty where the king protects his subjects. Prayers to “break the arms of the wicked” (Ps 10:15) or “smash the teeth” (58:6) or “turn your wrath upon” (69:22-28) would not be an expression of personal revenge but of Eternal retribution promised by the suzerain (Deut 32:35-36).

9. As guarantee, the Psalms promise and predict what He will do (1:4 and 35:5; 35:8 and 9:15; 35:26 and 6:10).

10. As control, imprecatory Psalms actually restrain the believer from physical violence, leaving the response of injustice to God.

11. As finality, the Psalms are expressions of God’s promise that evil and evildoers would be defeated and overthrown. “If the Jews cursed more bitterly than the Pagans this was, I think, at least in part because they took right and wrong more seriously. For if we look at their railings we find they are usually agree not because these things have been done to them but because these things are manifestly wrong, are hateful to God as well as to the victim.” C.S. Lewis, *Reflections on the Psalms* (1958): 30.

12. As jealousy, the Psalms express God’s zeal for His people and His righteousness.

We are reticent to tell others we like "justice movies" because we live in an age of niceness. But the world is not nice. Evil exists and must be stopped. Yes, it would be nice to think everything can be solved by human love, mercy, kindness, and generosity. Only Jesus can establish peace for humans after His ultimate recompense. We should be honest with ourselves. We like to see the bad guys "get it in the end." As humans we respond to evil desiring justice, because we bear the image of The One who is just. (Taken from “Violence in Film,” Mark Eckel, *When the Lights Go Down: Movie Review as Christian Practice*)

Suffering

The question is not "Why?" but "How?"

Part Eight: Silent Screams, Loud Pain

"I don't think either he or I realized how much of his sense of being was tied to his role as a reporter until he lost it. When months, then half a year, then a year went by and no one answered his requests for job interviews, when it became apparent that his resume wasn't going to get him that next career position, his heart broke. When he lost his longtime job, he felt he'd also lost his purpose. You know, when you talk to people who are struggling to find employment, especially people over the age of 40 or 50 – that's really a very looming issue for them. Rick felt like a failure. I don't think people who commit suicide are selfish, I think they're in agony." Rick's wife, Shannon Cagle Dawson, comments this week on WFYI.

Up in the Air I know what it's like to be out of work. When I hear of my brother who has been unjustly treated or his plant is about to close, I have great empathy I know how it feels. Not once, not twice, but five times.

First Peter was written to meet no theological heresy; it was written to strengthen men and women who were in jeopardy of their lives. --William Barclay

1. Our view of suffering is our view of God "Blessed be . . ." 1.3; First Testament: both source/focus; *Eulogy*, a "formula" (Eph 1.3); Hymn, "Doxology" Refocus: Look up not down; takes hours/days

2. Our response, not the suffering, is key "Blessed be . . ." Genesis 45.5-9; 50.20

3. Our suffering is a privilege "exiles" temporary residence outside one's homeland (not forced, not refugees); "elect" Privileged status; chosen for the task of displaying God's blessing, protection, provision; "of the dispersion" Christians everywhere, anticipating Home. "let those who suffer according to God's will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good" (4.19) "faithful" Fall foliage for me. "entrust" = turn over to another. God has willed. "doing good" How to respond to suffering

4. Our suffering benefits others "Peeping," "voyeurism," looking through the window from the outside at our great salvation 1.12 Ephesians 3.10

5. Our suffering and salvation "Guarded" = military context, kept safe, protected. "are" present participle. "By god's power" + "through faith" = belief is energizing, enabling personal faith "salvation" past, present, **future**

6. Our suffering is temporary Mary's Magnificat "My spirit rejoices in God my savior" Luke 1. "Rejoice"—NOT used by pagan writers of the day. External, outside, Heavenly origin. 1 Peter 4.13 "rejoice and be glad when Christ's glory is revealed. Philippian jailor "rejoiced" Acts 16.34. "Now" vs. Then. "Little while" vs. eternity. "May have to" = purpose exists but may not be clear to us (Eph 3.10) "Suffer" = be grieved, always refers to the emotion of grief, not to the suffering that brings it "various trials"—universal application

7. Our Suffering in this Life is Made Up for in the Next Life Inheritance—OT, family, earthly. Imperishable—unable to be worn out, decay. Undefined—ceremonial, unfit v. full approval. Unfading—compared to earthly wealth, never grows dim. Kept in heaven for you—perfect past participle, past activity continuing into the present.

Prayer. Dear Lord. I hurt. People have hurt me. Those who call themselves believers have hurt me the most. My pain is etched across my soul and shows up on my face when I'm not careful. I cry even when there are no tears in my eyes. The ache is so deep that I doubt I will ever climb out of the chasm. Help me Lord, help me Lord. I know You have felt my pain in the Person of Your Son, in whose name I pray, and sometimes scream in pain, Jesus. ["Sighs" in Warp and Woof]

Being human always points, and is directed, to something or someone, other than oneself . . . Suffering creates meaning in life . . . Viktor Frankl *Man's Search for Meaning* (p 110)

When worldwide influenza broke out in 1918-19 Dr. Paul Brand's parents helped everyone in their mission vicinity. A priest and his wife had fallen ill. Everyone deserted them except . . . my parents . . . Nursed by his "enemies," the priest realized he had badly misjudged the Brands. He asked for papers for adoption. "My son was to be priest after me," he told my father, "but no one in my religion has cared enough to help me. I want my children to grow up as Christians" (Brand, Yancey. *Pain: The Gift No One Wants*, p 20).

The Walking Dead: Silent Screams, Loud Suffering *This series asks the questions everyone asks...*

1. How does one deal with searing loss?
2. Is this life all there is?
3. Why should we care?
4. Why not give up?
5. Is life worth it, do we keep going?

Questions

1. How do I respond to feeling exposed, naked, or disenfranchised?
2. Do we know Rick Dawsons with whom we can share the gospel?
3. How do we deal with feelings that no one else can see?
4. Why must I focus on "there and then" not "here and now?"
5. When do I see my suffering as part of God's plan, temporary to this life, or of benefit for others?

Suffering

The question is not “Why?” but “How?”

Part Nine: When Others Persecute Us

“Their usually peaceful and quiet beliefs stand as a rebuke to those who are corrupt, to those who cannot tolerate the presence of any view but their own, and to those who want to make their own political regime the only focus of loyalty. Christians are silent witnesses to the sovereign God. And evil men hate it.”

Marshall, *The Blood Cries Out*

Why Were Christians Persecuted? 1. Threat to Roman Authority: a. Enemy of the State (Jesus as “Lord” and “King”); b. Insurgent Terrorist (Acts 4, 5, 7, etc.); c. Individual Non-Conformist (Acts 21, 22);

2. Antithetic to Cultural Mores: A. Protecting the Ethos of the Roman Mindset (Acts 15; Romans 1); B. Threatening the Economics of the Roman World (Acts 19); 3. Scapegoat for Societal Ills: A. “Blame the Christians” (Acts 24:2-9); B. “They are turning the world upside down” (Acts 17:6)

Pressures from Without: Persecution in 1 Peter NT Theme: Jesus: John 16:33; Paul: 2 Timothy 3:12

Peter: 1 Peter 1:6-7; 2:18-20; 3:1, 13-17; 4:1-4, 12-19; 5:10

Pressures from Within: Prostitution in 2 Peter: OT Theme: Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Hosea

Because persecution is hard to take, some people feel the need to fit in rather than stand out

1. To feel accepted we accommodate; 2. To accommodate we accessorize; 3. To accessorize we associate; 4. To associate we abandon; 5. 1st Peter (persecution) leads some to 2nd Peter (prostitution)

Persecution Begins Against Authority, Words: Romans could not abide any other authority but their own; Persecution of Christians was and is engendered by those who reject any other authority than their own; Persecution against authority always begins with persecution against words.

“Opponents” from 2nd Peter: 1. Rejects Historic Christianity as “Myth” (1:16; see Luke 1:1-4; Acts 1:1-3)

2. Twisting Scripture (3:16); 3. Denial of Jesus’ Future Return (1:16-18; 3:4-7); 4. Acceptance of Moral License (2:1-3, 11-16); 5. If there is no future judgment, there is no present restraint (2:19)

What Kind of Persecution? 1 Peter 1:6 “Now for a little while you may have to” Indicates that the opposition was sporadic, limited to pockets of social, financial resistance against believers and physical attacks on Christians. 1 Peter 1:6 “trials” of “various kinds” are general words, the result of some evil intent. “Suffer” means there are difficulties and sorrows caused by opposition. This opposition is broad—everything from slander to threats to physical torment. “Suffer” = same word Jesus uses at last supper describing all He would face

How Should Christians Respond to Persecution? 1. Understanding Who We Are: “Aliens and Strangers” (1:1; 2:11); “God’s People” (2:9-10). 2. Understanding Our Place in The World: a. Good Citizens (2:13-17); b. Model Slaves (2:18-25); c. Gentle Wives (3:1-6)

The Results of Persecution in 1st Peter: a. Silencing, Shaming Evildoers (2:12; 3:16); b. Gives Meaning to Life (4:12-19); c. Perseverance (1:7, 13; 2:1; 4:7, 19; 5:8-10); d. Hope in Eternity (1:3, 13, 21; 3:15); e. Solidarity with Others who Suffer (5:9)

Asking the Wrong Question: Why die for something they KNEW was not true?! Why be loyal to a God who allows you to suffer?! The question isn't "why does God allow suffering?" but "Why do people who suffer still worship this God?"

2nd Peter Challenges to Readers: 1. Grow in Knowledge (1:2-3, 5-6, 8, 12, 14, 2:9, 20-21; 3:3, 17-18); 2. Beware (3:17; see 1 Peter 1:17); 3. Be Holy (3:10-13; see 1 Peter 1:13-16); 4. Remember the Truth (1:12, 13, 15; 3:1, 2, 15; "don't forget" 3:5, 8); 5. Stay on The Way (2:2, 15, 21; Acts 9:2; 16:17; 18:26; 19:9, 23; 22:4; 24:14, 22)

A Warning to American Christians:

- We should NOT refer to our present political situation in America as "persecution"
- We should be aware that all persecution does begin with marginalization, loss of position, and financial attacks
- The "persecution" we really face in this country is consumerism
- I fear American Christians may fall under the label of "prostitutes" rather than "persecuted"

Jehoiakim, confronted by God's Word, burns the scroll on which The Word is written. In marked contrast to his father, a good king of Judah, Josiah, Jehoiakim and his officials do not show any fear nor do they tear their clothes: a physical act to demonstrate repentance. Indeed, believing he could destroy the authority of the words by fire, Jehoiakim then sought to kill the human messengers of The Word. Like many megalomaniacs before and after him, Jehoiakim's tyranny is marked by an attempt to eradicate The Word. Artillery shells scoring direct hits on the University Library of Bosnia in 1992 destroyed 1.5 million books. American journalist Mark Danner trying to understand the devastation asked the leader of the Bosnian Serbs, himself a published poet, why attack a library? "Only Christian books were burned," was the horrific reply. "The others were removed." Dutch investigator of war crimes, Jan Boeles, maintains that "the cultural identity of a population represents its survival in the future. . . . [destroying a library is] the murder of a people's cultural identity." Burning books rapes human intellectual heritage. *I Just Need Time to Think*, Mark Eckel

What is our obligation? (1) Christians should support and encourage governments which desire to protect the righteous and reject wickedness; (2) Christians must speak out in social and political venues to keep the plight of persecuted Christians before the public eye; (3) "Human rights" is a key theme in the world and should be supported by believers in our culture as an ethic which proceeds from only the Christian worldview; (4) Christians must motivate and mobilize each other, that we not become dispassionate observers, rather activists against Christian persecution; (5) Christians must acknowledge that our doctrine of ecclesiology is very narrow, refocusing on The Church, universal; (6) We need scholars in The Church who will commit their lives to research on behalf of the oppressed; (7) Being people of compassion, we should promote law that shows the love and beneficence of God; (8) We are commanded as Christians to expose the works of darkness; and (9) We Christians need to read our own Church history to discover why we are persecuted. From Mark Eckel, "Under the Desk But Not Underground," *warpandwoof.org*, 10 July 2010, an address at Moody Chapel, 4 December 2004.