

“Tough Questions: The Problem of Suffering”

I. Problem of Suffering

II. Purpose of Suffering

- Judgment (Gen. 3)
- Conviction (Acts 9)
- Instruction / Correction (2 Cor. 12; Heb. 12)
- Testimony / Advance of the Gospel (Phil. 1:12-18; 1 Pet. 2:11-12)
- Jesus' identification with us (Suffering Servant – Is. 52-53)
- Deeper faith and greater holiness (2 Corinthians 1:8-9)
- To give us greater joy in our reward and the glory of Christ (2 Corinthians 4:17-18)
- To wake up other Christians and make them bold (Philippians 1:14)
- Suffering moves Christians to the places He wants them to go (Acts 8:1, Acts 11:19)
- Suffering magnifies the power and worth of Christ (Mt. 13:44-46; 2 Cor. 12:9-10)
- Suffering gives us an opportunity to stand out as Christians in a world that does not honor God (1 Peter 4:16)
- Suffering teaches us to rely on God, not on ourselves (2 Corinthians 1:8-9).
- Suffering teaches us God's decrees (Psalm 119:71)
- Suffering matures us into godly people the Lord is molding for himself (James 1:2-4).
- The Savior receives glory through our suffering (1 Peter 4:13).
- Suffering even allows us to share in the Son's glory (Romans 8:17).

III. Perspective on Suffering (eternal vs temporal)

- God wills it (Acts 4:27-28; 1 Thess. 3:3-4)
- Jesus was the Suffering Servant (Is. 52-53; Phil. 3)
- Suffering is normal for Christians (Jn. 15:20; 1 Pet. 4:1, 12-13)
- Rejoice when suffering for the cause of Christ (Acts 5:41; Col. 1:24)
- Focus on eternity and joyfully accept suffering righteously (Heb. 10:34)
- Suffering isn't worthy to be compared to the glory that will soon be revealed (Rom. 8:18)

IV. Practical Issues Today:

A. Euthanasia

B. Suicide (1 Sam. 31:3-6; 2 Sam. 17:23; 1 Kings 16:15-19; Mt. 27:3-5)

C. Counseling the Suffering

Discussion & Application:

1. Why do some people think that suffering in this world is a proof that God does not exist? How would you answer that?
2. Why did suffering come into our “good” world (Gen. 1-3)? How far did suffering spread according to the Bible (Gen. 3; Rom. 8)? How does this help explain “natural disasters”?
3. Is suffering ever associated with our personal sins? Is it always? If not, what biblical examples can you find of someone suffering and it wasn’t their fault?
4. Look at the list of biblical purposes for suffering. How many of those have you experienced? How did they ultimately help you? How did they positively impact people around you?
5. What is your normal attitude (perspective) toward suffering? According to our study what should it be? If your attitude doesn’t align with Scripture what specifically can you do about it right now?
6. Laws are being passed in favor of euthanasia. What are your thoughts about euthanasia? Are there biblical examples of people who wanted to die because their life seemed so miserable? Does the Bible ever condone this? Should medical professionals be forced to participate in this?
7. What does the Bible say about suicide? Is it the unpardonable sin? What would you say to someone who was suicidal? How might you restore their hope that life is worth living even when it’s hard?
8. How are you preparing other disciples for suffering? When is the best time to talk about it? What biblical truths will you give to help young disciples be ready to stand for Christ no matter what?
9. Are you currently suffering? Does anyone else know? Are you letting others bear your burdens (Gal. 6:1)?

Augustine’s prayer: “God of our life, there are days when the burdens we carry chafe our shoulders and weigh us down; when the road seems dreary and endless, the skies grey and threatening; when our lives have no music in them, and our hearts are lonely, and our souls have lost their courage. Flood the path with light, run our eyes to where the skies are full of promise; tune our hearts to brave music; give us the sense of comradeship with heroes and saints of every age; and so quicken our spirits that we may be able to encourage the souls of all who journey with us on the road of life, to Your honor and glory.”