

Why?



**“If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you.”
James 1:5**

**“And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.”
Romans 8:28**

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Preface

Many of us do not understand God.

We hear about God and His Son, Jesus Christ. We are told the good news that Jesus died for our sins and we can be saved from going to hell if we believe in Him. However we do not want to follow Jesus without being sure we know what we are doing. So we ask many questions, but to our surprise, we rarely get satisfactory answers. An impasse is reached and our relationship with God stalls. Why does this happen?

Our own wisdom is insufficient to understand God.

The Bible makes a distinction between the wisdom of man and the wisdom of God. Man's wisdom is gained through experience and knowledge and depends on an ability to understand. God's wisdom is a gift from above and comes through revelation. 1 Corinthians 1:21 shows that we cannot know the things of God using our own wisdom. "For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe."

Nicodemus could not understand what it meant to be born again. Jesus said to him, 'I tell you the truth, unless a man is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.' 'How can a man be born when he is old?' Nicodemus asked (John 3:3 – 4). Jesus replies to Nicodemus 'The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.' Jesus was saying to him to trust in God and not to try to work it all out. "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding". (Proverbs 3:5).

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God gives and withholds understanding.

God can give to, or take understanding away from anyone. In Luke 10:21 Jesus praises God “because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children”. In His mercy, God sometimes calls out to us. However He is waiting for us to respond to Him. “If you had responded to my rebuke, I would have poured out my heart to you and made my thoughts known to you” (Proverbs 1:23). Instead of directing our questions to God, we try to work out the answers ourselves or ask someone else. If we acknowledge God and ask Him then He will answer us. James 1:5 “If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him.”

We need to believe in God.

If we refuse to follow God until our questions have been answered, then we are saying we do not trust Him. “This is not good, because without faith it is impossible to please God” (Hebrews 11:6). “Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved” (Acts 16:31). God is someone we can trust fully. He is a good God and “will lead us in ways of righteousness and peace. The one who trusts in him will never be put to shame”. (Romans 9:33).

Introduction

Curious minds want to know! Why am I here, why are you here, why is anything here? Why did God even put the Earth into motion and plant us on it?

We are born wanting to know why. What was the first word your child learned to use? Why. What was the last word your child used this morning? Why.

We spend our entire lives wanting to know why. That is one reason God promised to give us wisdom if we would only ask.

If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you. James 1:5

For the Lord gives wisdom; from his mouth come knowledge and understanding. Proverbs 2:6

We will address many of your questions in this booklet including:

- Why Did God Create Satan?
- Why Did God Create Us?
- Why Am I Still Here?
- Why Aren't My Prayers Answered?
- Why Is God So Hard To Understand?
- Why Does God Let Bad Things Happen?
- Why Does God Allow Trials & Suffering?
- Why Does God Allow Evil?
- Why Does God Allow War?
- Why Did God Allow The Coronavirus?

Why Did God Create Satan?

Background

God created Satan as Lucifer, the highest ranking angel of all. Lucifer, however, wasn't content to worship and serve his Creator. Full of pride, he rebelled, leading a third of the angels. Unable to match the Almighty God, Lucifer was cast to the earth where he has operated as the devil ever since.

The biblical passages of Job, Isaiah 14:12-15, Matthew 4:3-10, and Revelation 12:7-12 provide a glimpse of Satan's history and character.

God did not create Lucifer as evil but allowed the potential for sin. While God cannot commit sin, He doesn't take it away from those who do. When Lucifer chose to rebel, he instantly became the author of sin. Evil is the result of a free-will choice by Lucifer.

Satan and sin don't foil God's divine purposes

Evil in stark contrast to good, shows God's mercy to whom He chooses to provide salvation. God uses evil and demons for His divine purposes.

1 Samuel 16

15 And Saul's servants said unto him, Behold now, an evil spirit from God troubleth thee.

16 Let our lord now command thy servants, which are before thee, to seek out a man, who is a cunning player on an harp: and it shall come to pass, when the evil spirit from God is upon thee, that he shall play with his hand, and thou shalt be well.

Satan Fears God

Satan fears God's predestined plan: salvation, new heaven, and new earth for His chosen people who are made holy, perfectly moral, and volitionally loving. He will prove that He is victorious over evil and

evil beings who follow Satan's ways. Personal peace of mind about Satan and evil comes from being God-centered. God rules forever!

Nothing Happens That God Does Not Allow

Tony Evans tells this story: "Our God is sovereign. That means there's no such thing as luck. Anything that happens to you, good or bad, must pass through His fingers first. There are no accidents with God. I like the story of the cowboy who applied for health insurance. The agent routinely asked him, 'Have you ever had any accidents?' The cowboy replied, 'Well no, I've not had any accidents. I was bitten by a rattlesnake once, and a horse did kick me in the ribs. That laid me up for a while, but I haven't had any accidents.' The agent said, 'Wait a minute. I'm confused. A rattlesnake bit you, and a horse kicked you, Weren't those accidents?' 'No, they did that on purpose.'"

There are no accidents with God

God's sovereignty is his complete and absolute rule, control, and power over all things. God has decreed all that has ever happened and ever will happen and ultimately brings about all things he has purposed.

He has total control of all things past, present and future. Nothing happens that is out of His knowledge and control. All things are either caused by Him or allowed by Him for His own purposes and through His perfect will and timing.... He is the only absolute and omnipotent ruler of the universe and is sovereign in creation, providence and redemption.

There are no accidents with God. And he has a perfect timing for everything he does.

Remember the former things of old; for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done, saying, 'My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose,' Isaiah 46:9-10

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Have you ever felt like you were in the middle of a perfect storm? How did I get here? How did this happen? Wherever we find ourselves and whatever we have to deal with we can know that God in his infinite wisdom has designed it for our good and to make us like Christ and bring him glory.

It's no accident you are where you are. Even if you got there because of an accident. God has a perfect plan and there are no accidents with him. The family you were born into was no accident. The country you live in, the language you speak, the friends you have, your weaknesses, mistakes you have made, poor decisions—none of them are accidents to God. Failures with your spouse and children, things you wish you had done differently, painful experiences—none of them are accidents to God.

Joseph's brothers intended to harm him, but later in life Joseph saw that it was God's intent to bless him through the sinful actions of his brothers. They meant it for evil; God meant it for good.

Do you regret certain decisions you've made? Did things not turn out the way you had hoped? Do you feel stuck now? Do you wish you had done things differently? There are no accidents with God.

God in his sovereignty even overrides our sins. Maybe you really blew it. You feel like your sin has wrecked your life. Maybe you are suffering long-term consequences for a bad mistake. Remember there are no accidents with God. God is not the author of sin, and he doesn't tempt us to sin. But even when we sin and bring consequences into our lives, God in his sovereignty can even work our failures and sins for our good.

"And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose."

Romans 8:28

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Why Did God Create Us?

The short answer to the question “why did God create us?” is “for His pleasure.” Revelation 4:11 says, “You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being.” Colossians 1:16 reiterates the point: “All things were created by him and for him.” Being created for God’s pleasure does not mean humanity was made to entertain God or provide Him with amusement. God is a creative Being, and it gives Him pleasure to create. God is a personal Being, and it gives Him pleasure to have other beings He can have a genuine relationship with.

Being made in the image and likeness of God (Genesis 1:27), human beings have the ability to know God and therefore love Him, worship Him, serve Him, and fellowship with Him. God did not create human beings because He needed them. As God, He needs nothing. In all eternity past, He felt no loneliness, so He was not looking for a “friend.” He loves us, but this is not the same as needing us. If we had never existed, God would still be God—the unchanging One (Malachi 3:6). The I AM (Exodus 3:14) was never dissatisfied with His own eternal existence. When He made the universe, He did what pleased Himself, and since God is perfect, His action was perfect. “It was very good” (Genesis 1:31).

Also, God did not create “peers” or beings equal to Himself. Logically, He could not do so. If God were to create another being of equal power, intelligence, and perfection, then He would cease to be the one true God for the simple reason that there would be two gods—and that would be an impossibility. “The LORD is God; besides him there is no other” (Deuteronomy 4:35). Anything that God creates must of necessity be lesser than He. The thing made can never be greater than, or as great as, the One who made it.

Recognizing the complete sovereignty and holiness of God, we are amazed that He would take man and crown him “with glory and honor” (Psalm 8:5) and that He would condescend to call us “friends” (John 15:14-15). Why did God create us? God created us for His

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pleasure and so that we, as His creation, would have the pleasure of knowing Him.

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Why Am I Still Here?

One of the most frequently asked questions I get from the seniors I visit is “Why am I still here?”

Why do you think God has left you here on earth instead of immediately taking you to heaven the moment you were saved? Think of all the hardships and heartaches you’d have escaped. Imagine the joys you’d be experiencing with Christ in heaven. But then again, who would be here to tell others the gospel of salvation if all the believers were taken out of this world?

If you are living and breathing, then the heavenly Father has a purpose for you, a ministry to fulfill. Don’t think of ministry as something done only in a church building by a select group of people. Service to God is the responsibility of every believer. It’s a matter of doing the “good works, which God prepared beforehand” for each of us to accomplish (Eph. 2:10).

Although the way we serve may change over time, we are never called to retire and do nothing. Even a bed-bound saint can pray for others or offer encouraging words to visitors and caregivers. A believer’s goal should not simply be to attend church, listen to a sermon, and receive enough spiritual food to get through the coming week. The goal is to serve God with our whole being, reflecting the love of Jesus through who we are. Our worship of God and instruction from His Word is what edifies and equips us to serve one another and go into the world to share the gospel.

Your entire life is meant to be an act of service to God. If instead you are living for your own happiness and goals, you will eventually be disappointed. But when you walk in the good works God has prepared for you, you’ll have the satisfaction of doing exactly what you were created to do.

Our purpose in life is the very meaning of our existence and without knowing this we often suffer ignorant of our own significance. We fall prey to the illusion that our lives don’t matter and we have no connection or impact on the world around us. The Bible offers

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many insights into man's purpose on Earth and living within a meaningful mission. Rest assured that God has a plan for you that was established at the beginning of time when your spirit and soul were created and equipped with certain spiritual gifts to enable you to carry out that plan.

Ephesians 2:10

10 For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

1 Thessalonians 5:18

Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

Romans 8:28

28 And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.

Hebrews 13:20-21

Now may the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

What may not be obvious to you may be very obvious to others. Let me give you an example.

There was a sweet lady who I visited weekly at an assisted living facility here in Burlington and who lived to be 105 years old before going to heaven a few years back. She did not need any medicine, could eat anything she wanted, had never been to the hospital except to have babies, and just went to sleep peacefully and contently one night and woke up in heaven. No sickness, no injury, no reason other than Jesus just thought it was time for her to come home. On the day she went to heaven she followed her same routine which she did seven days a week. She woke up wide awake and refreshed, ate a good hearty breakfast, ate a good wholesome meal at lunch, and then spent the afternoon on the porch where she held court. Friends would come from all over the facility to visit

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along with several who drove up to the porch, got out to visit a few minutes, and then drove off. To each one, this sweet lady always had a pretty smile, sweet spirit, warm hug, and something encouraging to say. All topped off by reminding that she loved them and prayed for them.

She often asked me just why she was still alive after so many years and just what purpose her life served. What was so obvious to me just hadn't occurred to her. She was a drive thru source of love, caring, and encouragement!!! People could always count on getting a non-judgemental free dose of her loving heart and sweet spirit when they might not have had anywhere else to turn. God had put her here and kept her here because this old world needed the light that she so freely shone into the hearts of a whole world of hurting and lonely souls.

Could it be that you are still here because your light continues to shine for those living in the darkness of a hard and troubled world?

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Why Aren't My Prayers Answered?

I heard from someone last week who asked “How long am I supposed to pray if God continues to ignore me?”

It might feel like God is ignoring you when He doesn't answer your prayers the way you're hoping. But Scripture offers us insights as to why God might appear to be silent. One verse that I've found most helpful in my own life – when it comes to unanswered prayer – is Psalm 84:11, in which the Psalmist said “No good thing will [God] withhold from those who walk uprightly.” I find three principles (and loads of encouragement) in this verse for why God might not be answering my prayer or yours.

1. God's idea of a “good thing” might be different than yours.

You might be praying for a husband, a job you've been hoping for, or to win the lottery. Why would God not give you any or all of the three? Because even though you might feel it's good for you to be married, or to be working in a job you like, or to have more money, God's opinion might differ. Just because something makes us happy doesn't mean it's good for us, eternally. And God has our eternal best in mind.

In Matthew 7:11 Jesus said, “If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him.”

We want our children to be happy, but not at the expense of their health, and therefore we don't give them candy at every meal. We want them to hold down a good job, but we won't do that job for them because learning responsibility and the consequences of a bad decision are more healthy and good for them in the long run. Trust that God, your Heavenly Father, knows what is best for you. And while you may be heartbroken at His “no,” He may very well be sparing you a bigger heartache down the road.

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2. God is waiting for you to be obedient.

Scripture exhorts husbands to be considerate of their wives and treat them with respect so that their prayers aren't hindered (1 Peter 3:7). And Psalm 84:11 says "no good thing will He withhold from those who walk uprightly." Are you walking uprightly? Is your life not only obedient, but surrendered to Him? If not, God may be withholding or refusing to acknowledge your prayers to get you back into line with His will and purposes.

3. It isn't the right time.

God has three answers. Yes, no, and wait. Because He can see what's eternally best for us, and He can also see what's coming down the road (and we can't), trust His judgment. Don't second-guess Him. His timing is always better than yours. If you are walking uprightly and what you're asking for is truly a good thing then, according to Psalm 84:11, God is not withholding after all. It just isn't time.

4. You aren't asking in faith.

How we pray is just as important as what we pray for. In James 1:5-8 we are told:

"If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you. But when you ask, you must believe and not doubt, because the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. That person should not expect to receive anything from the Lord. Such a person is double-minded and unstable in all they do."

Furthermore, Hebrews 11:6 says, "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." So ask in faith and without hesitation or doubting. God may be waiting for you to truly believe He can do what you are asking for.

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5. God has something better for you than what you are asking for.

This is my favorite reason for why God says “no” but we so often forget to consider it. Because He is good and knows what’s eternally best for us, and doesn’t want us to settle, God sometimes says no or closes a door because He has something better for us that we haven’t even thought to ask for. He is One who can do “immeasurably more” than all we can ask or imagine (Ephesians 3:20). Trust His timing. Trust His “no.” And trust His idea of what is eternally best for you. He really is a good father.

Billy Graham

So often we are inclined to think that the only answer God can give our prayers is “yes.” We need to remember that “no” is an answer also. “No” is certainly an answer of love on the part of our Heavenly Father when we ask Him for things which are not really for our good or for His glory. God does not always give us what we want; He gives us what we need. Just as a good parent does not grant all the requests of his child, God does not answer every request in the way we desire.

When we think of “unanswered” prayer, it may be that we do not understand the way in which God responds to our requests. He may not grant an immediate answer, and sometimes our prayers are answered in a way that we fail to recognize. We pray for prosperity, and sometimes financial stress is given. But our souls are made stronger for the test. We pray for health, and affliction is given, and we are better able to sympathize with those in affliction. God makes no mistakes, though at times we may question His wisdom.

Our motive for making a request to God must be pure. If your prayer is self-centered, concerned with the gratification of your own desires, God cannot, in faithfulness, grant your requests. James 4:3 says, “When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.”

Perhaps you are praying for a person close to you, and you have not seen any changes. God can work through your prayers to soften a

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heart or to bring about circumstances to draw those for whom you are praying closer to Him. However, God has given man a free will. If your prayers are not always answered as you expect, it is not because God is not working in the situation. It may be that the person for whom you are praying has not yet responded to God's call. You must not permit yourself to give in to despair. You should, however, continue in prayer, knowing that the Lord is more concerned for them than you are and that it is His will to help them; read 1 Timothy 2:4, 2 Peter 3:9, and 1 John 5:14-15.

David Jeremiah

Why don't my prayers get answered? I've had a lot of people ask me that question. There once was a pastor who had a 5-year-old daughter and the girl noticed that every time her dad stood behind the pulpit and was getting ready to preach, he would bow his head for a moment before he began to preach. And the little girl noticed that he did this every single time. So one day after the service, the little girl went to her dad and she said, "Dad, why do you bow your head right before you preach your sermon"? "Well, honey," the preacher said, "I'm asking the Lord to help me preach a good sermon". And the little girl looked up at her father and asked, "Then how come he doesn't do it"? Unanswered prayer. Everybody who knows anything about prayer and praise has a little different take on it and here's a young lady who's a teenager. Here's where her thoughts are on prayer. She said, "God answers prayer four ways: "Yes," "No," "Wait a while," and "You've got to be kidding". Which tells you some of the things she asked for that she didn't get.

I remember years ago I read a story about a man who was being pursued by a roaring hungry lion. Feeling the beast's hot breath on his neck and knowing his time was short, he began to pray as he ran. He cried out in desperation, "Oh Lord, please make that lion a Christian". Within seconds, the frightened man became aware that the lion had stopped the chase. When he looked behind him, he found the lion kneeling, his lips moving in obvious prayer. Greatly relieved at this turn of events, the young man went to join the lion in his meditation and, as he approached the king of the jungle, when he

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was near enough, he heard the lion praying, "And bless, Oh Lord, this food which I am exciting grateful for".

There's always something with a little humor in it but, let's be honest, there's nothing really funny about praying and not feeling like you're getting answered. The problem of unanswered prayer is not something that started with our generation. In the Old Testament, Habakkuk struggled with his unanswered prayer. He cried out, "O Lord, how long shall I cry, and you will not hear"? Job struggled with unanswered prayer. In Job 31:35 we have his words, "Oh, that I had one to hear me! Oh, that the Almighty would answer me". King David struggled with unanswered prayer. In Psalm 13, we read his words, "How long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me"? Habakkuk, Job, David, all echo the frustrations that many of us have had at one time or another when it seems as if God is not answering our prayers.

Now, let me be right upfront with this. The Bible says that God does not hear and answer the prayers of those who do not belong to his family. Praying is a family exercise. It belongs to those who are in the family of God. The only prayer that God hears from someone who's not a Christian is, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner". But even after we become members of the family, we began to realize that sometimes when we pray, it doesn't seem like our prayers are working. There are several places in the Word of God that simply say that under certain circumstances God will not answer our prayer". And this is what I want us to explore in these next few moments. I hope we can use this as a sort of checklist. If my prayers are not being answered, could the reason be found on this list? Let's begin.

Sometimes our prayers are not answered because of unprayed prayers. James 4, verse 2, says, "You have not, because you ask not". It's amazing to me how many people say, "God doesn't answer my prayer". When I begin to talk with them, I find out they have never specifically asked God for the thing they say they have not received. God is not gonna answer your prayer for some specific thing because you pray at the dinner table. You're to ask him, the Bible says, "Ask, and ye shall receive; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you," Matthew chapter 7. The biggest reason why prayers aren't answered and this is probably bigger than all of

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the other reasons, is they're just not offered. We have not because we ask not.

And then the Bible says that sometimes our prayers are not answered because of unconfessed sin. I used to think there was just maybe one verse about this in the Bible but during this particular study I have found out that this is a prevalent truth in the Word of God. Here's the most famous verse that says that, Psalm 66:18, "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear". Or Proverbs 15:29, "The Lord is far from the wicked, but he hears the prayer of the righteous. Or Proverbs 28, verse 9, "One who turns away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer is an abomination". Or Isaiah 1:15, "When you spread out your hands, I will hide my eyes from you, even though you make many prayers, I will not hear. Your hands are full of blood". Isaiah 59: 1 and 2, "Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; nor his ear heavy, that it cannot hear. But our iniquities have separated you from your God; and your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear". Or 1 Peter 3:12, "For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and his ears are open to their prayers; but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil".

Sometimes as followers of Christ, our prayers don't get answered because we're harboring unconfessed sin in our lives. Go back with me to the first verse, Psalm 66:18. Read it again. "If I regard iniquity in my heart". Notice, it doesn't say, "If I sin, the Lord will not hear me". It says, "If I regard iniquity in my heart". In other words, if I know there is a sin in my life and I'm not doing anything about it. A person who regards iniquity is one who holds a particular sin in his heart and he loves it and he makes an alibi for it and he excuses it and he covers it up. It is not primarily, therefore, the fact of sin that keeps us from getting our prayers unanswered, it is the love for it and the excusing of it that pushes God away from us.

The prayer God wants to hear from us when we have sin in our lives is 1 John 1:9, "If we confess our sin, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sin and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness". All of us, as believers, sin. The Bible says, "If a person says, 'I do not sin,' he is a liar and he doesn't do the truth". But it's what we do with it when it happens that God cares about. He's opened a way for us to have

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instantaneous forgiveness. But if we harbor something that we know is evil, something that's sinful and then we try to pray, we will often find it to be very difficult.

Sometimes our prayers are not answered because of unprayed prayers and unconfessed sin and sometimes our prayers are not answered because of unbelieving minds. It says in James chapter 1, "Let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. For let not that man suppose he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways". What does it mean to be double-minded? It means to trust God and then not to trust him. To trust him over here, not to trust him over here. To believe him here, to not believe him here.

Someone has written this in a little free verse. It goes like this. "As children bring their broken toys with tears for us to mend, I brought my broken dreams to God because he was my friend. But instead of leaving him in peace to work alone, I hung around and tried to help with ways that were my own. At last, I snatched them back and cried, 'How could you be so slow?' 'My child,' he said, 'what could I do? You would never let them go.'" To be double-minded is not to let the request go, not to be able to give them up completely to God. To give them to God and take them back. Sometimes our prayers aren't answered because we pray them and then we take them back. And we try to work out the solution ourself instead of trusting God.

And then number four, sometimes our prayers are not answered because of unrighteous motives. James 4, verse 3 says, "You ask and you do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures". Now, let's just be honest about this, men and women. God is not the big genie in the sky. He is not the sugar daddy just waiting for you to come and tell him all of the fluffy little wonderful things you would like. Maybe we do that when we're little kids, but grown-ups need to know better than that. God is not there in heaven just waiting for you to ping him so he can give you everything you ever dreamed of, no matter what you've heard on television or on radio. 1 John 5:14 says, "This is the confidence that we have in God, that if we ask anything according to his will, he will hear us". Matthew 6:9 and 10 says, "Hallowed be your name. Your

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kingdom come. Your will be done". Psalm 37:4 says, "Delight yourself in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart".

We must remember that God's ultimate concern is not with our team winning the ball game, but in himself being glorified in the process. His ultimate concern is not that we all have perfect health but that we lift every ounce of our health up to his honor and glory. His ultimate concern is not that we have a high-paying job, but that we praise him and are thankful for what he provides. His ultimate concern is that we are consumed with his glory in whatever state we are in and I believe that God delights in giving even the smallest of things to his children. But we must weigh the motives of our hearts against the substance of our requests. We must ask, "Is my desire in this to see God glorified in my life or am I just wanting this so that it's for me"? Sometimes we don't pray right. Listen to me now. Sometimes we pray, "Thy will be changed," not "Thy will be done". Do you ever pray that prayer? Maybe not in those words but, Lord, can we talk about this once more? Thy will be changed. Someone said, "When you pray, do you give instructions or do you report for duty"?

Sometimes, number five, our prayers are not answered because of unresolved conflicts. The Bible says in Mark chapter 11, "When you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive him, that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses. But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father in heaven forgive your trespasses". Again, in Matthew chapter 5, it says, "Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. Be reconciled to your brother, and come and offer your gift". The Bible says, "If you are harboring resentment or unforgiveness or anger in your heart toward another brother or sister, it may not shut down your prayer life. It just says it will hinder it. It'll get in the way. It's almost like you're coming to the Lord with your prayer and you hear him in the back of your mind saying to you, "Have you taken care of that yet"? And it takes the edge off of it. Nothing is so important as maintaining the right relationships that you have with others.

And then number 6 tells us that our prayers are not answered because of uncompassionate hearts. Proverbs 21:13 says, "Whoever

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shuts his ears to the cry of the poor will also cry himself and not be heard". Wow. This is not about trying to feed the world's hungry although we ought to be concerned about that. This prayer barrier is about failing to have compassion for those we know who are in need. The Bible says when you harbor an uncompassionate spirit, when you don't ask God to make you sensitive to people you can help, then it will be hard for you to have the relationship in prayer that you desire. And then finally, the last one and I have to tell you, this is for men only. All you women can't listen to this. I'm fooling with you a little bit because you all need to listen to it but I'll never forget when I first understood this. And I read the verse and I read it and I thought, "Is that really true"? And I read it again and every time I've read it, I've come back and so I'm gonna read this verse to you and you see if you have the same response I do.

1 Peter 3:7, "Husbands, likewise, dwell with them," your wives, "with understanding, giving honor to the wife, as to the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life, that your prayers may not be hindered". Wow. Men, what that says to us, if we're Christian husbands and we have a Christian wife, our relationship with our wife can often be the reason why God isn't listening carefully to our prayers. This passage of Scripture says that men that are not having the right kind of relationship with their wives can, at the very least, find their prayers hindered. It makes it hard to pray for your wife when you haven't been loving her and meeting her needs and living with her according to the teaching of the Word of God, according to knowledge. On the other hand, just think of the potential that is wrapped up in the two of you praying together for something because the Bible says that "if two of you agree on earth concerning anything that they ask, it will be done for them by the Father".

When you pray with your wife, men, you open up an incredible potential before God. I know that for most of us who are "A" personalities, I confess, praying with your wife may be a difficult thing. But praying with your wife is an important thing. The Bible says, if you don't cherish and honor the woman in your life who is your wife, if you don't try to serve her, if your relationship with her is not right, it will affect the way you pray and what happens when you pray. So there you have it. Unprayed prayers, unconfessed sin, unbelieving minds, unrighteous motives, unresolved conflicts,

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uncompassionate hearts, and unresponsive husbands. I wanna give you one final little paradigm that wraps all of this up in four statements. This is what this is all about. I've written this down in the front of my Bible, and here's what it says.

"When you pray, if the request is wrong, God says, 'No.'" How many of you know, "No" is an answer? We try to teach our kids that but we don't like it when it comes back to us. "Yes" is the answer we want but "No" is an answer, and I am so thankful for the times over my life, as I look back over my shoulder, when I have prayed for something and God has said, "No". I didn't like it at the time but, oh, do I see it now. So if the request is wrong, God will just say, "No," and you'll get it. If the timing is wrong, God will say, "Slow". How many of you know God isn't on our schedule. God doesn't work off of our calendar app. God doesn't work off of our time schedule. God works totally off of his time schedule and when we ask for something, he's not obligated to give it to us by next Thursday.

So sometimes, we ask God for something and it's a good request and it's a legitimate request but the timing for the reception of it is just not right. Sometimes, we ask God for something and if the request is wrong, he says, "No," and if the timing's wrong, he says, "Slow". And sometimes, and this has been the bulk of the message today, we ask God for something and we are wrong. Something's going on in our life that needs to be fixed. And when that happens, God says, "Grow". Grow up, get it right. And the good news is that if the request is right and the timing is right and you were right, God says, "Go".

I want you to know that God answers prayer. He's answered a lot of prayers for me, continues to answer them for me every day. But I'm like you, I know I can do better with this prayer thing. And I'm sure when we get done with our lives and we look over our shoulders and somebody says, "If you could do something better, what would you do"? Somebody asked Billy Graham that question and he said, "If I could do anything better, I would pray more. I would have prayed more in my life". All of us feel that. You know, someone said, "If you wanna empty an auditorium, announce that you're gonna preach on prayer 'cause nobody will come". 'Cause everybody has a bit of a sense of guilt in our hearts that we don't pray as we ought. Can I get

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a witness? Kind of somber but it's a good witness. So you know what? This is not to make us feel guilty about prayer, this is to help us find out how we can be more effective in praying. I got some things in my life right now that I really need God for. How about you? I wanna make sure that I don't have anything in the way of God being able to hear my prayer and answer it and I hope you feel the same way.

A lady came up to me. She said, "I've been praying for my father and he's getting close to the end of his life and God doesn't seem to be hearing". And I told her, Howard Hendricks who was a good friend of mine once told me that he prayed for his father for every single day for 72 years. And at the very end of his life, before he died, he became a Christian. All I can say to you is if you're praying and it seems like God isn't answering, remember, God's not on your time schedule and so you're to pray, continually, faithfully, every day, no matter what. Don't give up, don't quit. Keep praying. He loves you and he cares about you. He wants you to get your prayers answered. And let's make sure we understand that the one reason most of us don't get 'em answered is this. 'Cause we don't ask em. "We have not, because we ask not".

Why Is God So Hard To Understand?

**“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.”
Isaiah 55:8-9**

Introduction

Many of us do not understand God. We hear about God and His Son, Jesus Christ. We are told the good news that Jesus died for our sins and we can be saved from going to hell if we believe in Him. However there are many who do not want to follow Jesus without being sure they know what they are doing. So we ask many questions, but to our surprise, we rarely get satisfactory answers. An impasse is reached and our relationship with God stalls. Why does this happen?

Our Own Wisdom Is Insufficient To Understand God

The Bible makes a distinction between the wisdom of man and the wisdom of God. Man's wisdom is gained through experience and knowledge and depends on an ability to understand. God's wisdom is a gift from above and comes through revelation. 1 Corinthians 1:21 shows that we cannot know the things of God using our own wisdom. The Bible says “For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe.” Nicodemus could not understand what it meant to be born again. Jesus said to him, “I tell you the truth, unless a man is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” “How can a man be born when he is old?” Nicodemus asked in John 3:3 – 4. Jesus replies to Nicodemus “The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.” Jesus was saying to him to trust in God and not to try to

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work it all out. Proverbs 3:5 says “Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding.”

God Gives And Withholds Understanding

God can give to, or take understanding away from anyone. In Luke 10:21 Jesus

praises God “because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children.” In His mercy, God sometimes calls out to us. However He is waiting for us to respond to Him. In Proverbs 1:23 Jesus says “If you had responded to my rebuke, I would have poured out my heart to you and made my thoughts known to you.”

Instead of directing our questions to God, we try to work out the answers ourselves or ask someone else. If we acknowledge God and ask Him then He will answer us. James 1:5 says “If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him.”

We Need To Believe In God

If we refuse to follow God until our questions have been answered, then we are saying we do not trust Him. This is not good, because “without faith it is impossible to please God” we are told in Hebrews 11:6. “Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved” we are instructed in Acts 16:31. God is someone we can trust fully. He is a good God and will lead us in ways of righteousness and peace. Romans 9:33 reminds us that “The one who trusts in him will never be put to shame.”

We Don't Have To Understand God

When we don't understand something about God, some people are tempted to discredit him completely. We were often taught in Sunday School that you don't have to understand everything to believe in something. It is called having faith. In John 9, Jesus met a man who was born blind and forced to beg just to get by. Jesus'

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disciples wanted to know whose fault it was that the man was blind: Was it his fault? Or his parents?

For some reason, it's human nature to place blame. For example, if someone gets cancer, some Christians might wonder, What do you think they did to deserve cancer? If someone's wife walks out, insensitive churchgoers might think, If he had been a better spiritual leader, his wife wouldn't have done that. If a teenager is rebellious, hardened onlookers might privately reflect, If that kid's parents had been more involved, this never would have happened.

People Like To Place Blame

In John 9:3 when the disciples wondered who to blame, to their surprise Jesus answered, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned... but this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life".

This man had spent years enduring the hardships of a life without sight, and Jesus basically said that God would be glorified through this tragedy. God can have a purpose in our pain. In a coming lesson we will address why God allows suffering and pain.

Just because God can use what happens doesn't mean he causes everything. God does cause some pain Hebrews 12:7-11 talks about God "disciplining" his children, but much pain - especially that caused by the sins of other people - is not caused by God. He may allow it, but he doesn't cause it. That's an important distinction. Recognizing this fact might still leave us angry with him (and I'm guessing he probably understands when it's a person in pain). We learn to overcome this anger as we get to know God. And as we do, we learn how to trust that he is still good, loving, and wise in everything he does, even if we don't know why things happen.

God Will Give You Understanding

You can't read your Bible alone.

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No, this isn't a criticism of private devotional times. Rather, we are not able to read our Bibles without help from the very one we are trying to see and hear from in our Bible reading. God himself gives us understanding when we read our Bibles, and without his help, we can do nothing.

But when we say this, it must not be taken to mean that we open our Bibles, sit back, close our eyes, and wait for God to talk to us. As with everything in the Christian life, we must "work hard" at understanding the Bible, though it is "not us, but the grace of God" we are told in 1 Corinthians 15:10. It is precisely in the very natural, hard work of reading and laboring to understand meaning where God illumines our minds to "understand with spiritual eyes and not merely natural understanding" we read in 1 Corinthians 2:14–15.

Why Do We Have Storms In Our Lives?

We all experience what could be called storms of life. They come in various forms, such as relational, financial, emotional, physical, and spiritual. Sometimes they are even the result of our own foolish choices. The trouble that comes to us may be the harvest of what we have sown in the past. And that was certainly the case with Jonah.

When Jonah tried to run away from God's assignment, the Lord brought a corrective storm into his life. And because He loves us, He will similarly disrupt our plans when we insist on going our own way instead of submitting to His will. God's storms ...

Get our attention. Storms disrupt our normal routine in such a way that we stop to consider what God is doing in our lives.

Humble us. The Lord challenges our pride and self-reliance so we realize that we are not in charge and can do nothing apart from Him.

Lead us to repentance. Sometimes the consequences of our sin and rebellion are so painful and troublesome that we come to our senses and turn back to God in humble obedience.

Align our life with His plans. Storms cause us to let go of our stubbornly held plans and yield to His will no matter what it costs us.

Crying out to the Lord is the best response in a storm. Like Jonah, we should humble ourselves in the midst of our circumstances, submit to God's dealings with us, turn from our rebellion to obedience, and yield to His will. Only then will we become a useful servant in His mighty hand.

Why Does God Let Bad Things Happen?

“Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was pelted with stones, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my fellow Jews, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false believers. I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked.”

The Apostle Paul - 2 Corinthians 11:24-27

No One Is Immune

Don't you think Paul, the greatest evangelist that ever lived and one of the most pleasing servants that ever followed Christ, must have asked this very question many many times.

It's an age-old question, and among the most difficult to answer. We have all thought about it, tried to explain it, and struggled with it. We all wonder exactly how God can be all-loving and still allow such immense pain. It doesn't seem right, it doesn't seem fair, and it is probably the biggest stumbling block that keeps us from truly trusting in God. Yet in a strange way, the pain we experience in life may be the best sign that he truly is good and that through pain we see his love for us.

What is Good and What is Bad?

To answer this question, we have to start by defining what makes a thing good or bad. Some of these answers seem easy: cancer is bad, violence is bad, death of a loved one is bad, the Holocaust was bad. Most people would agree on this definition of 'bad things'. These are things that leave us in shock and in pain. These are things that can leave us questioning not only whether God is good, but whether he even exists.

Why?

And if God is good, what exactly is ‘good’? Is goodness having things that make us happy? Is goodness peace, quiet, rest and joy? Is goodness found in the absence of pain, or in the absence of fear? Or does goodness go deeper than these things?

A Time to Mourn

“A time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance.” (Ecclesiastes 3:4)

It is clear throughout Scripture that God is good, but it is also clear that we will endure pain, fear, and heartache. Even though God is immensely good, bad things will happen.

So then why doesn’t God guard us from the weeping and mourning and just give us the laughing and dancing?

One thing that this verse confirms is that throughout the course of a human life, we will experience the full spectrum of human emotion. This verse confirms that there is a time for each of those emotions, even the bad ones, the ones we don’t want to experience. We may never know how God is working through our pain and mourning, but even in the midst of excruciating, unspeakable pain we can be confident that he is present and active.

We can know this because Christ himself endured such pain. In fact, the word ‘excruciating’ literally means, ‘the pain of crucifixion’. When we see the unjust, the unfair, the painful, and the excruciating, we can know that Jesus himself experienced that same pain on our behalf out of his deep love for us.

A Time to Die

**“Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?”
1 Corinthians 15:55**

On Easter Sunday of 2019, this rhetorical question written out by the Apostle Paul became extraordinarily relevant. As many of us were getting ready in our Sunday best to head to church and celebrate the

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Resurrection, we heard news that churches in Sri Lanka had been attacked. Nearly 300 people died as a result. We were once again presented with the strange contrast of Christianity: as we celebrate life, we simultaneously mourn death.

Yet this is what brings us comfort, that although we mourn, we do not mourn as those with no hope. Because of the death and resurrection of Christ, we grieve with hope, and we can say to even the most horrific death, 'where is your sting'? Paul says in Philippians 1:3, "For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain". In the deepest struggles of life, and even in death, Paul's joy and desire is for Christ to be glorified.

When we see the world through the lens of eternal life, we are given a new perspective.

This is why James writes, "Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance" (James 1:2-3).

A Time for Joy

"Joy to the world, the Lord is come"

In a piece by Al Mohler, we learn that this classic Christmas carol is not really about Christmas, but about the future. Mohler writes, " 'Joy to the World' is based upon Psalm 98, which declares creation's joy when the Lord comes to rule and to judge. When we sing 'Joy to the World, the Lord is Come,' it applies when we talk about Bethlehem and when we rejoice in the gift of the infant Christ. But the song also reminds us that Christmas isn't over; the promises of Christmas are not yet fulfilled. Earth will fully receive her King when Christ comes again, "to reign and to rule."

Our only true good, and our only true joy in this world is found in Christ. Because of what Christ has done, we see a picture of what Christ will do, and this is why we have joy. This is how we can know God is good, and this is why we are able to face suffering with joy.

Why?

The New Testament book that speaks most about joy is the book of Philippians. The irony of this book is that it is written by Paul while he is in prison, arrested for the crime of believing in Christ. This makes the theme of joy all the more extraordinary: prior to accepting and following Christ Paul had all the things one would seem to want from life. He was educated, respected, admired, and successful. This new found faith in Christ led him away from that type of security, and instead brought him beatings, imprisonment, and ultimately death. Yet it is in this new life that Paul finds true joy, and it is there that we find it as well.

A Future Without Suffering

“He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.”

Revelation 21:4

There is no answer to our question without looking to the future, and without seeing through the prism of God’s kingdom. Jesus puts it this way, “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).

Jesus himself never answers the question of why bad things happen in this world, other than to confirm that they will continue to happen. He confirms that the world is fallen because we are out of the relationship with God that we are meant to live in. The hope and peace we so desperately seek is not found in stopping every bad thing from happening, because we simply can’t do it. Jesus even tells us that.

The good we seek lies in the confidence that he has overcome the world, and that through his redemptive work he will one day bring all things back into order. It is only then that every tear will be wiped away, and all that is ‘bad’ will be forgotten. We can’t keep every evil and every injustice from happening, but we can know that God is good, he is working even when we can’t see it, and that one day all that is good and true will be fully restored.

Why?

Every Affliction Is Someone's Blessing

I recently preached a sweet lady's funeral earlier this year. She had served The Lord her entire life. She was only 86 and was still going strong. She had years left in a pretty strong body but she was taken home to heaven with a sudden and major stroke. Her family asked over and over - just how can God use this for the good?

Every service I preach I always make sure everyone leaves knowing how they can go to heaven. At the end of the service but before we went to the cemetery, this lady's sister came up to me and asked how could God use her sister's death for something good? All I could say was that my faith teaches me He will but we may never be privy to just how until we get to Heaven.

After the graveside service I had two people come up and say that after hearing me tell how they could go to heaven to be with this dear lady, they had trusted Jesus for their salvation! If the sweet lady we were honoring had not had a stroke and died we would not have had that service and those two individuals might not ever have heard the gospel and really made their decision to trust Christ for their salvation. What do you think was more important to God - the lady living a few more years in this tough old world or those two souls living forever in heaven with him???

We need to remember - Our Affliction May Be A Blessing To Others...

Why?

Why Does God Allow Trials & Suffering?

“Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was pelted with stones, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my fellow Jews, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false believers. I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked.”

The Apostle Paul - 2 Corinthians 11:24-27

Why Does God Allow Trials?

When we were still children in school, most of us preferred field trips to sitting still and listening to classroom lectures. However, believers would probably all prefer to learn our lessons from the textbook of God’s Word rather than on a field trip of trials. But the truth is that there are some things we learn best through experience.

Although trials are not always the result of sin, they do play a big corrective role in our lives. The heavenly Father may use them to draw our attention to sins we have tolerated, overlooked, or accepted as normal. These could be habits, attitudes, activities, or anything else that is not God’s absolute best for His child. No matter how trivial we may think it is, no sin should have a place in a believer’s life.

At other times, the Lord may be showing us we need to release something that’s not necessarily sinful but nevertheless is preventing us from reaching our God-given potential—perhaps a relationship, our goals and ambitions, a job, or a home. It could be a reminder to prioritize Him over our desires so that we might know and love Him more.

If we never had any troubles, we’d continue in what’s comfortable, easy, and enjoyable but would end up missing God’s best for our life.

Why?

That's why the psalmist said, "It is good for me that I was afflicted, that I may learn Your statutes" (Psalm 119:71). Any hardship that drives us to God and His Word is good for us. That's because what we gain in knowing the Lord is worth so much more than all the wealth, power, and fame the world could offer us.

Psalm 119

65 You have dealt well with Your servant, O LORD, according to Your word.

66 Teach me good discernment and knowledge, For I believe in Your commandments.

67 Before I was afflicted I went astray, But now I keep Your word.

68 You are good and do good; Teach me Your statutes.

69 The arrogant have forged a lie against me; With all my heart I will observe Your precepts.

70 Their heart is covered with fat, But I delight in Your law.

71 It is good for me that I was afflicted, That I may learn Your statutes.

72 The law of Your mouth is better to me Than thousands of gold and silver pieces.

Why Does God Allow Suffering?

Of all the letters Paul wrote, Second Corinthians is the most autobiographical. In this letter Paul records the specifics of his anguish, tears, affliction, and satanic opposition. He spells out the details of his persecution, loneliness, imprisonments, beatings, feelings of despair, hunger, shipwrecks, sleepless nights, and that "thorn in the flesh"—his companion of pain. How close it makes us feel to him when we see him as a man with real, honest-to-goodness problems, just like ours!

It is not surprising, then, that he begins the letter with words of comfort, especially verses 3 through 11. Ten times in five verses (vv. 3–7) Paul uses the same root word, Parakaleo, meaning literally, "to call alongside."

This word involves more than a shallow pat on the back. This word involves genuine, in-depth understanding . . . deep-down compassion and sympathy. This seems especially appropriate since

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it says that God, our Father, is the "God of all comfort" who "comforts us in all our affliction." Our loving Father is never preoccupied or removed when we are enduring sadness and affliction!

There is another observation worth noting in 2 Corinthians 1. No less than three reasons are given for suffering, each one introduced with the term that: "that we will be able to comfort those who are in any affliction"; "that we would not trust in ourselves"; "that thanks may be given" (vv. 4, 9, 11). Admittedly, there may be dozens of other reasons, but here are three specific reasons we suffer.

Reason #1: God allows suffering so that we might have the capacity to enter into others' sorrow and affliction.

Reason #2: God allows suffering so that we might learn what it means to depend on Him. Over and over He reminds us of the danger of pride, but it frequently takes suffering to make the lesson stick.

Reason #3: God allows suffering so that we might learn to give thanks in everything. Now, honestly, have you said, "Thanks, Lord, for this test"? Have you finally stopped struggling and expressed to Him how much you appreciate His loving sovereignty over your life?

How unfinished and rebellious and proud and unconcerned we would be without suffering!

May these things encourage you the next time God heats up the furnace!

Years ago I heard a statements about suffering that I have never forgotten: "When God wants to do an impossible task, He takes an impossible individual—and crushes him."

Why?

This song by The Perrys says it perfectly!!!

The Potter Knows The Clay

I know you are going through the fire
Its getting hard to stand the heat
But even harder is the wondering
Is God's hand still on me

Its lonely in the flames
When you're counting days of pain

But the Potter knows the clay
How much pressure it can take
How many times around the wheel
'Til there's submission to His will
He's planned a beautiful design
But it'll take some fire and time
Its gonna be okay
'Cause the Potter knows the clay

Friend I just came through that fire
Not too very long ago
And looking back I can see why
And that my God was in control

But on the hottest days I'd cry
Oh Lord, isn't it about time

But the Potter knows the clay
How much pressure it can take
How many times around the wheel
'Til there's submission to His will
He's planned a beautiful design
But it'll take some fire and time
Its gonna be okay
'Cause the Potter knows the clay

He's planned a beautiful design
But it'll take some fire and time
Its gonna be okay
'Cause the Potter knows the clay

Why?

Why Does God Allow Evil?

The Bible describes God as holy (Isaiah 6:3), righteous (Psalm 7:11), just (Deuteronomy 32:4), and sovereign (Daniel 4:17-25). These attributes tell us the following about God: (1) God is capable of preventing evil, and (2) God desires to rid the universe of evil. So, if both of these are true, why does God allow evil? If God has the power to prevent evil and desires to prevent evil, why does He still allow evil? Perhaps a practical way to look at this question would be to consider some alternative ways people might have God run the world:

1) God could change everyone's personality so that they cannot sin.

This would also mean that we would not have a free will. We would not be able to choose right or wrong because we would be "programmed" to only do right. Had God chosen to do this, there would be no meaningful relationships between Him and His creation.

Instead, God made Adam and Eve innocent but with the ability to choose good or evil. Because of this, they could respond to His love and trust Him or choose to disobey. They chose to disobey. Because we live in a real world where we can choose our actions but not their consequences, their sin affected those who came after them (us). Similarly, our decisions to sin have an impact on us and those around us and those who will come after us.

2) God could compensate for people's evil actions through supernatural intervention 100 percent of the time.

God would stop a drunk driver from causing an automobile accident. God would stop a lazy construction worker from doing a substandard job on a house that would later cause grief to the homeowners. God would stop a father who is addicted to drugs or alcohol from doing any harm to his wife, children, or extended family. God would stop gunmen from robbing convenience stores. God would stop high school bullies from tormenting the brainy kids. God would stop thieves from shoplifting. And, yes, God would stop terrorists from flying airplanes into buildings.

Why?

While this solution sounds attractive, it would lose its attractiveness as soon as God's intervention infringed on something we wanted to do. We want God to prevent horribly evil actions, but we are willing to let "lesser-evil" actions slide—not realizing that those "lesser-evil" actions are what usually lead to the "greater-evil" actions. Should God only stop actual sexual affairs, or should He also block our access to pornography or end any inappropriate, but not yet sexual, relationships? Should God stop "true" thieves, or should He also stop us from cheating on our taxes? Should God only stop murder, or should He also stop the "lesser-evil" actions done to people that lead them to commit murder? Should God only stop acts of terrorism, or should He also stop the indoctrination that transformed a person into a terrorist?

3) Another choice would be for God to judge and remove those who choose to commit evil acts.

The problem with this possibility is that there would be no one left, for God would have to remove us all. We all sin and commit evil acts (Romans 3:23; Ecclesiastes 7:20; 1 John 1:8). While some people are more evil than others, where would God draw the line? Ultimately, all evil causes harm to others.

Instead of these options, God has chosen to create a "real" world in which real choices have real consequences. In this real world of ours, our actions affect others. Because of Adam's choice to sin, the world now lives under the curse, and we are all born with a sin nature (Romans 5:12). There will one day come a time when God will judge the sin in this world and make all things new, but He is purposely "delaying" in order to allow more time for people to repent so that He will not need to condemn them (2 Peter 3:9). Until then, He IS concerned about evil. When He created the Old Testament laws, the goal was to discourage and punish evil. He judges nations and rulers who disregard justice and pursue evil. Likewise, in the New Testament, God states that it is the government's responsibility to provide justice in order to protect the innocent from evil (Romans 13). He also promises severe consequences for those who commit evil acts, especially against the "innocent" (Mark 9:36-42).

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In summary, we live in a real world where our good and evil actions have direct consequences and indirect consequences upon us and those around us. God's desire is that for all of our sakes we would obey Him that it might be well with us (Deuteronomy 5:29). Instead, what happens is that we choose our own way, and then we blame God for not doing anything about it. Such is the heart of sinful man. But Jesus came to change men's hearts through the power of the Holy Spirit, and He does this for those who will turn from evil and call on Him to save them from their sin and its consequences (2 Corinthians 5:17). God does prevent and restrain some acts of evil. This world would be MUCH WORSE were God not restraining evil. At the same time, God has given us the ability to choose good and evil, and when we choose evil, He allows us, and those around us, to suffer the consequences of evil. Rather than blaming God and questioning God on why He does not prevent all evil, we should be about the business of proclaiming the cure for evil and its consequences—Jesus Christ!

Why?

Why Does God Allow War?

War is a very controversial subject in both the world and the church. Considering the broad spectrum of views and opinions, those who follow Christ would do well to search the Scriptures and ask, What does the Lord think about war?

In order to gain a proper understanding, we must first consider the condition of our fallen world. War is a natural consequence of sin. Some conflicts are fueled by evil intentions and desires, but others are a battle between right and wrong. God hates bloodshed, but if evil is not forcefully resisted, the wicked will prevail.

The Lord established government as a means of promoting good and restraining evil, and national authority comes directly from Him. But some rulers abuse their power and must be stopped. In such cases, God allows war for the sake of the innocent.

The Old Testament also includes instances when God used war for the sake of achieving His purposes. He commanded the Israelites to fight for possession of the land He'd promised them and to kill the inhabitants, who were extremely evil (Deut. 20:1; Deut. 20:17-18). In addition, He used war to judge and punish wicked nations (Jer. 25:12-14) and even to discipline His own people (Jer. 5:15-17).

As you think about this difficult subject, remember that God's goal is the destruction of wickedness, not people. In the final battle, Jesus will defeat sin and death, wars will cease, and righteousness will reign (Revelation 19:11-16). Until that day, we are left on earth to do our part in overcoming evil.

Why Did God Allow The Coronavirus?

“For he will deliver you from the snare of the fowler and from the deadly pestilence. He will cover you with his feathers, and under his wings you will find refuge; his faithfulness is a shield and buckler. You will not fear the terror of the night, nor the arrow that flies by day, nor the pestilence that stalks in darkness, nor the destruction that wastes at noonday.”

Psalm 91:3-6

“Why would God allow Covid-19?” The whole world seems to be asking this question, a fact that actually gives the biggest part of the answer. More on that shortly.

COVID-19, or coronavirus disease 2019, is a respiratory illness caused by a coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2). The effect of the illness can range from mild to severe. First identified in Wuhan, China, in late 2019, the virus quickly spread to other countries. On March 11, 2020, COVID-19 was declared a pandemic by the World Health Organization.

Only a liar or a true prophet can claim to know God’s reasons for bringing about COVID-19 or any other specific calamity. That’s partly because God’s purpose extends to every individual involved, from the beginning of time to the end of the world. Understanding every possible factor goes far beyond human ability, but God has within His complete knowledge and control every facet of every situation (Romans 8:28–30). The Bible reveals some insights about God’s use of deadly disasters in general, but we must apply relevant Scripture and the principles of faith in order to gain wisdom about any specific disaster.

As with any mystery, to solve it we must go from the known to the unknown in our search. So we’ll put the question of why God would allow COVID-19 into the context of what we already know from the Bible and from personal experience: we know that life is a gift from the Creator (Isaiah 42:5; Acts 17:25). We know that God alone has the right and power to give life and take it away according to His own wisdom and plans (Job 2:10). We know that life is short and includes

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some degree of suffering, ending in death and judgment for how we lived our lives—only one life with no “do-overs” (Hebrews 9:27). Short or long, our lifespan and date of death are set and controlled by God (Matthew 10:29). Even the longest human lives are “like a breath; their days are like a fleeting shadow” (Psalm 144:4).

Moses described God’s sovereignty over life and death, and this could have been written about today’s COVID-19 pandemic:

“You turn people back to dust, saying, ‘Return to dust, you mortals.’ A thousand years in your sight are like a day that has just gone by, or like a watch in the night. Yet you sweep people away in the sleep of death—they are like the new grass of the morning: In the morning it springs up new, but by evening it is dry and withered” (Psalm 90:3–6).

So what is God’s purpose in allowing COVID-19? Without being too dogmatic, we know that, generally speaking, one of God’s purposes in trials is to get the world’s attention off themselves and onto Him, their Creator and Savior—which is the biggest part of the answer to the question at hand. “Why would God allow COVID-19?” Millions are suddenly asking that question right now, believers and non-believers alike, which means that God is on their minds. God desires for all people to earnestly seek Him and find Him, discovering that He is actually close to us (Jeremiah 29:13; Acts 17:26–28). God desires us to sense our own weakness and neediness so that we put our trust in Him (2 Corinthians 12:9). God desires people to fear Him with proper reverence and awe (Proverbs 9:10); to love Him more than their own lives (Matthew 10:37; John 12:25); and to show love and gratitude for the Savior by loving and helping fellow humans, especially the suffering (Romans 15:1; James 2:14–17). God desires to shift our focus and affection away from this temporary, troubled world to our eternal, heavenly home (Colossians 3:1–2; Hebrews 12:1–2).

Times of trouble are a prime motivation for us to store up treasures in heaven rather than cling to treasures on earth (Matthew 6:19–20; Colossians 3:1–3), and to be good stewards of those blessings God gives us in this life (Luke 16:11; Matthew 25:14–30). God wants us to trust Him absolutely, knowing that our times are in His hand (Psalm 31:15).

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Ultimately, it is the poor and hurting who seek God, not the rich and comfortable. It is danger and calamity that turn men to their Savior, not health and wealth (see Mark 2:17). It is suffering that wakes us to our true need. C. S. Lewis put it this way: “God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pain: it is His megaphone to rouse a deaf world” (The Problem of Pain, HarperCollins, 1996, p. 91).

Life for all people means facing suffering, death, and their eternal destiny. Even if we develop immunity to COVID-19, we can't escape the fact of trouble in the world. What's best for us, in any situation, is to seek God: “Blessed are those who keep his statutes and seek him with all their heart” (Psalm 119:2).

Why Are Christians Hated?

There's nothing new about the fact that Christians can be a polarizing group of people. From the very beginning of the Christian movement, followers of Jesus around the world have been persecuted, arrested, threatened, beaten, tortured, and put to death.

In light of all that, some of us might be feeling silly for taking to the internet and complaining when people simply make fun of us.

Nevertheless, while believers in the West might not experience the same level of persecution as historic Christians or fellow believers around the world today, we do feel the sting of not being liked. Maybe it has even cost you a promotion at work. Or maybe it has limited the relationships you have with certain people.

But why does the world hate Christians so much? Our message is one of love. God loved the world so much that he sent his Son to die for us that we might have life. Yet, we still seem to rub people the wrong way.

Sometimes, Christians are disliked through no fault of their own. Other times, we needlessly bring it upon ourselves. It takes wisdom and spiritual maturity to know when we're being hated for the right reasons.

Here are seven reasons why the world may hate that you're a Christian, some good and some bad:

1. Good Reason: Your moral integrity annoys people.

When I was in elementary school, one kid on the playground never said any curse words. He grew up in a Christian home and believed it was deeply wrong to swear.

When some of the other students caught wind of this, they made it their mission in life to get him to say a swear word. They tried everything. They cursed more and more around him. They insulted him—and his mother. They even offered to bribe him with money and

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snacks if he would just say one curse word. He never did. I wish I had the same level of moral integrity and fortitude as that kid.

He did not waver in what he believed. And for some reason, that annoyed the other kids. Maybe it made them feel guilty when he wouldn't sink to their level. Maybe they just thought he was being ridiculous. Whatever the case, they were annoyed by the strength of his convictions.

This happens with believers. Strong beliefs and a strong commitment to live by them elicit a strong response. And that response isn't always positive.

2. Bad Reason: You're judgmental.

On the other side of this, sometimes Christians are guilty of being judgmental. We tend to think we're better than other people because we've experienced a measure of transformation. We live good Christian lives.

We become arrogant in our convictions, and that makes us look down on other people. People can sense that. And they don't like it.

3. Good Reason: Your contentment and confidence make people uneasy.

Christians ought to be some of the most inwardly peaceful people on the planet.

Here's what Paul says in his letter to the Philippians: "Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me." (Philippians 4:11-13)

Once this kind of unshakable confidence takes root in your heart, it begins to seep out of you. People notice. Some might wonder if you're for real. They also may wonder if you're just clueless to the problems of the world.

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Certain people may grow frustrated with you, because they just can't figure out what makes you tick. Your confidence makes them insecure. Your contentment makes them envious and confused. Sometimes people lash out at you because they don't like what they're seeing in themselves.

4. Bad Reason: You're unrelatable.

I love Christians, but we have a tendency to be weird. We have our own lingo, music, and movies, and that can isolate us from the rest of the world.

The longer we stay in our 'holy huddles,' the more bizarre we become to the unbelievers around us. It's quite common for followers of Jesus to not have many, if any, close relationships with nonbelievers.

To a certain measure, we should be weird. But the things that should be noticeably weird about us are our unshakable hope, our undying faith, and our selfless love.

For the unbelievers in our neighborhoods, classrooms, and workplaces to come to love us (and, we pray, to love Jesus), they have to know us. We should learn to relate to them on their terms and invite them into our lives.

That's when we break down barriers and give people an opportunity to see who Jesus really is.

5. Good Reason: You stand up for the weak and vulnerable.

Any time you stand up for the protection of the weak and vulnerable, you are doing the work of Jesus. In today's culture, standing for the rights of unborn children may lead to a large portion of the population hating you—including some notable celebrities.

Try as you might to state your position lovingly and logically, certain people will never listen until God changes their hearts. So until that person has an encounter with Jesus, we must learn to respond

graciously to the hateful things that are said about us when we stand up for what we know to be true.

6. Bad Reason: You act hatefully.

Standing up for what is good and true in society is noble. Shouting, insulting, and holding up signs with graphic images of abortions or slurs against the LGBTQ+ community is distasteful. In fact, it's downright hateful.

We ought to disagree with the unbelieving world where we feel compelled by Scripture and conscience. In some cases, we should disagree very strongly and unequivocally. But the message that should permeate every disagreement is this: "I love you, even though I think you are deeply wrong."

Without love, we're no better than those who act hatefully toward us. We can't say we're being persecuted for the cause of Christ when we ourselves are standing in hate.

Jesus didn't come full of hate. He came full of grace and truth. That's the line we walk.

7. Good Reason: You love your God too much.

Daniel was an influential government official, and the other officials in the empire couldn't stand how much God seemed to bless everything he did. So they conspired to bring him down.

Here's what they came up with: "At this, the administrators and the satraps tried to find grounds for charges against Daniel in his conduct of government affairs, but they were unable to do so. They could find no corruption in him, because he was trustworthy and neither corrupt nor negligent. Finally these men said, 'We will never find any basis for charges against this man Daniel unless it has something to do with the law of his God.'" (Daniel 6:4-5)

The only thing they could think to use against Daniel was his devotion to God. In every other aspect of life, he was unassailable. There was no way they could bring him down.

Why?

May the same be said of us. We don't want to cause any unnecessary stumbling blocks to the good news of Jesus. May the only complaint that can legitimately be levied against us be this: that we love our God more than someone else can understand.

Summation

The reason we feel this pressure as Christians is because we are in the midst of a spiritual battle.

Jesus once said that the gates of hell will not prevail against the Church. We often take comfort in that statement as we imagine ourselves hunkered down, surviving the demonic onslaught. But that isn't the image Jesus is painting.

When Jesus speaks about the gates of hell not prevailing, the image is not of protection, but of conquest. The church is on a mission not only to survive the darkness of this world, but to cast it out entirely.

The kingdom of darkness will not prevail against the kingdom that Jesus brings. The kingdom of light and life will come and destroy darkness and death. This is our mission.

And we can expect to ruffle a few feathers along the way. But take heart. Our victory is sure, and our God is good. The love of Jesus is far more powerful than hatred ever could be.

Now You Know Why We Have Storms In Our Lives

We all experience what could be called storms of life. They come in various forms, such as relational, financial, emotional, physical, and spiritual. Sometimes they are even the result of our own foolish choices. The trouble that comes to us may be the harvest of what we have sown in the past. And that was certainly the case with Jonah.

When Jonah tried to run away from God's assignment, the Lord brought a corrective storm into his life. And because He loves us, He will similarly disrupt our plans when we insist on going our own way instead of submitting to His will. God's storms ...

Get our attention. Storms disrupt our normal routine in such a way that we stop to consider what God is doing in our lives.

Humble us. The Lord challenges our pride and self-reliance so we realize that we are not in charge and can do nothing apart from Him.

Lead us to repentance. Sometimes the consequences of our sin and rebellion are so painful and troublesome that we come to our senses and turn back to God in humble obedience.

Align our life with His plans. Storms cause us to let go of our stubbornly held plans and yield to His will no matter what it costs us.

Crying out to the Lord is the best response in a storm. Like Jonah, we should humble ourselves in the midst of our circumstances, submit to God's dealings with us, turn from our rebellion to obedience, and yield to His will. Only then will we become a useful servant in His mighty hand.

Prepare For Your Journey In The Wilderness

As we consider Israel's first days in the wilderness, perhaps we should remind ourselves of where the Hebrew nation is in Exodus 15. They began their journey in the land of Goshen. If you have a map of that area handy, you might want to glance over it as you pinpoint their location. The Red Sea (or Sea of Reeds) is north of the Gulf of Suez. They crossed that sea, then began a south-southeasterly journey toward Mount Sinai. But before they arrived at the mount of God, they reached the wilderness of Shur in the northernmost section of the Sinai Peninsula. That's where the cloud and fire led Israel into the wilderness, with the shepherd Moses out in front of the flock. It was a vast expanse of desolation stretching south to the wilderness of Etham.

So that's where the Hebrews were. But why were they there? If God took the people through the Red Sea, couldn't He take them immediately to the lush land of Canaan? Of course! If He was able to part the waters, and enable them to walk on dry land, and deliver them from the Egyptians, wasn't He also able to move them swiftly to the borders of milk-and-honey-land? Absolutely! God can do anything. If He can take you and me through our conversion, He can hasten our journey across this earthly desert and swiftly deposit us into heaven. No problem . . . but He doesn't.

Why does God put us through wilderness experiences before Canaan? For one thing, He wants to test us. That's why God led Israel into the wilderness, according to Deuteronomy 8:2: "You shall remember all the way which the LORD your God has led you in the wilderness these forty years, that He might humble you, testing you, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not." (Read that again . . . only this time, slowly.)

Why?

God puts us in the wilderness to humble us, to test us, to stretch our spiritual muscles. Our earthly wilderness experiences are designed to develop us into men and women of faith. Let's face it, our spiritual roots grow deep only when the winds around us are strong. Take away the tests, and we become shallow-rooted, spiritual wimps. But bring on the wilderness winds, and it's remarkable how we grow as our roots dig deeply into faith.

Why?