

Grace Bible Church
2016 Biblical Counseling Conference
Track One

Session #4

Trials and Suffering

Introduction:

- It has been well said that if you're a Christian: you've just come out of a trial, are presently in a trial, or are being prepared to go through a trial.
- God often uses these trials and sufferings in our lives as a divine squeeze to let others and us see what's in our hearts. J.C. Ryle said, "What you are in the day of trial, that you are and nothing more."
- God also uses these trials to remove the dross from our lives—so like Job we can say, "When He has tried me, I shall come forth as gold." (Job 23:10, NASB)

I. Unbiblical perspectives concerning the origin of trials and suffering

- A. It's always _____ fault
- B. It's always _____ people's fault ("victim")
- C. It's _____ fault (Fatalism)

"In a universe of blind physical genetic replication, some people are going to get hurt, and other people are going to get lucky; and you won't find any rhyme or reasoning to it, nor any justice. The universe we observe has precisely the properties we should expect if there is at the bottom, no design, no purpose, no evil, and no good. Nothing but blind, pitiless indifference. DNA neither knows nor cares. DNA just is. And we dance to its music." River Out of Eden ~ A Darwinian View of Life, Richard Dawkins, 1996.

"God wants the righteous to live peaceful, happy lives, but sometimes even He can't bring that about. It is too difficult even for God to keep cruelty and chaos from claiming their innocent victims." ***When Bad Things Happen to Good People***, Harold Kushner, p. 43

"Can you accept the idea that some things happen for no reason, that there is randomness in the universe? ***When Bad Things Happen to Good People***, Harold Kushner

- D. God is _____ in it at all (Deistic view of God)

II. Biblical perspectives of the origin of trials and suffering

- A. Ultimately a result of Adam's _____ (Gen 3)
- B. God is _____ the remote (distant) cause of trials and suffering

Calvin suggested that God is the "remote" cause of all that happens, while men are the "proximate" causes. God thus is presented as the One who moves on the inclinations of men so that they, the "proximate" causes, do as God has willed from eternity. According to this theory, God wills from His holy nature so that He never wills men's actions from sinful motives. He said, "For God wills for good what men will for evil." Men are still responsible for their own sin. God's "permission" of sin is an active "permission" for His own holy purposes.

- 1. But He is never the author of _____ (Jas 1:12-18)

2. God is _____ so everything is planned by Him and goes according to how He decrees it to go (Isa 46:9-11; Eph 1:11; Dan 4:43-35; Job 42:22; Psa 115:3)
3. This includes _____ calamity and blessing (Eccles 7:14; Lam 3:37-38; Isa 45:7; Amos 3:6)

III. Biblical purposes in trials and suffering

- A. Always for God's _____ (Job 1 & 2; John 9:1-3; 1 Cor 1:26-31)
- B. Always for our eternal _____ (Rom 8:28-29)
 1. God may choose to set aside our temporary happiness to work a more grand work for our eternal good and His glory.

God L_____, O_____, and C_____ all things for His glory and our good.

2. Example: Paul in 2 Cor 12:7-10
3. Example: Joseph in Gen 50:20

See God in the trouble (use Jay Adams' book **How to Handle Trouble**)

- a. Recognize God is in the problem.
- b. Remember God is up to something.
- c. Believe that He is up to something good.
- d. Discover where and how God is at work.
- e. Get involved in what He is doing.
- f. Expect good effects.

Use **When God Weeps** – Joni Ereckson Tada

Use **Beside Still Waters – Words of Comfort for the Soul** by Spurgeon

IV. Biblical Responses of God's children in trials and suffering

- A. You must be responsible no matter how _____ - to always please Christ since we will also give an account (2 Cor 5:9-10)

Jerry Bridges "For many years in my own pilgrimage of seeking to come to a place of trusting God at all times-I am still far from the end of the journey-I was a prisoner to my feelings. I mistakenly thought I could not trust God unless I felt like trusting Him (which I almost never did in times of adversity). Now I am learning that trusting God is first of all a matter of the will, and is not dependent on my feelings. I choose to trust God and my feelings eventually follow." **Trusting God Even When Life Hurts**. Jerry Bridges, p. 194 & 195

Psalm 56:3-4 Whenever I am afraid, I will trust in You. In God (I will praise His word), in God I have put my trust; I will not fear. What can flesh do to me?

Psalm 71:1-2 In You, O Lord, I put my trust; let me never be put to shame. Deliver me in Your righteousness, and cause me to escape...

- B. Don't pray to just "hang in there" or "just get me through" the trial and suffering – but ask God to help you _____ in the midst of the difficulty to be more like Jesus (Rom 8:28-29; Jas 1:2-4)

An African Christian said this about American Christians: "You American always pray for God to remove the trial; we pray for God to strengthen our backs to bear it for His glory."

Elisabeth Elliot "There is a philosophy of secular education which holds that the student ought to be allowed to assemble his own curriculum according to his preferences. Few students have a strong basis for making these choices, not knowing how little they know. Ideas of what they need to learn are not only greatly limited but greatly distorted. What they need is help from those who know more than they do.

Mercifully, God does not leave us to choose our own curriculum. His wisdom is perfect, His knowledge embraces not only all worlds but the individual hearts and minds of each of His loved children. With intimate understanding of our deepest needs and individual capacities, He chooses our curriculum... God's curriculum for all who sincerely want to know Him and do His will always include lessons we wish we could skip." *Keep a Quiet Heart*, Elisabeth Elliot, p. 81-82

C. Possible _____ why God allows trials and sufferings:

1. Unconfessed sins (1 Cor 11:30; 2 Kings 5:15-27)
2. To chastise His children (Psalm 119:67; Heb 12:5-11)

Rick Warren said, "God uses pain to direct us, correct us, inspect us, perfect us, and to protect us."

3. God wants to increase our usefulness (pruning process—John 15:2; 2 Cor 1:3-9; 2 Pet 1:5-8)
4. To help us realize this isn't heaven and we live in a fallen world (2 Cor 4:16-18; Rom 8:22-24)

"We can rest contentedly in our sins and in our stupidities... But pain insists upon being attended to. God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pains: it is His megaphone to rouse a deaf world..." C.S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*, ch. 6 - quoted in Readings for Meditation and Reflection, edited by Walter Hooper, p. 71-72"

5. To allow us to reap what we sow (a natural consequence to our own choices—Gal 6:7-8; Prov 5:22)
6. To teach us about our own weakness and cause us to depend on God (2 Cor 1:8-9; 12:7-10)
7. To have us realize that we have placed our hope somewhere else or have spread it out between God and self/circumstances/other people/possessions. Our hope is to be squarely fixed upon God alone and His promises (1 Pet 1:13; Heb 6:19). At times we don't even know we have "little hopes" elsewhere until God allows a trial to come and reveal them to us.

Samuel Rutherford "If God told me some time ago that He was about to make me as happy as I could be in this world, and then had told me that He should begin by crippling me in all my limbs, and removing me from all my usual sources of enjoyment, I should have thought it a very strange mode of accomplishing His purpose. And yet, how is His wisdom manifest even in this! For if you should see a man shut up in a close room, idolizing a set of lamps and rejoicing in their light, and you wished to make him truly happy, you would begin by blowing out all his lamps; and then throw open the shutters to let in the light of heaven." **John Piper** "O how I pray that when God, in His mercy, begins to blow out my lamps, I will not curse the wind." John Piper, *A Godward Life*, p. 288-289

8. To enlarge our appreciation of His sufficiency (2 Cor 4:7; 12:7-10)
9. To test and strengthen our faith (1 Pet 1:6,7; 4:12)
10. To develop Christlike character (Jas 1:2-5)
11. To drive us to God's Word (Psalm 119:67, 71, 75)

Jerry Bridges "It is not that we will learn from adversity something different than what we can learn from the Scriptures. Rather, adversity enhances the teaching of God's Word and makes it more profitable to us. In some instances it clarifies our understanding or causes us to see truths we had passed over before." Jerry Bridges, *Trusting God*, p. 178

Martin Luther had discovered the same "method" of seeing God in his Word. He said there are three rules for understanding Scripture: praying, meditating and suffering trials. The "trials," he said, are supremely valuable: they "teach you not only to know and understand but also to experience how right, how true, how sweet, how lovely, how mighty, how comforting God's word is: it is wisdom supreme." Therefore the devil himself becomes the unwitting teacher of God's word: "the devil will afflict you [and] will make a real doctor of you, and will teach you by his temptations to seek and to love God's Word." *What Luther Says*, Vol. 3, Concordia Publishing House, 1959, p. 1360

V. Biblical resources available to the Christian through Christ

- A. The Father providentially is carrying out His decreed will for our lives: His will is good, perfect, and acceptable (Rom 12:2)
- B. Christ prays on our behalf (John 17:20-21; Heb 4:14-16)
- C. His Holy Spirit indwells His children (1 Cor 6:19-20)
- D. His grace is sufficient (2 Cor 12)
- E. Heaven is our home and it is sure (John 14:1-3; Heb 6:19)
- F. Christ is soon to return (1 Pet 1:13)

Selected Resources

When God Weeps, Joni Ereckson Tada
A Path Through Suffering, Elliot, Servant Publications, 1990.
Keep a Quiet Heart, Elisabeth Elliot
Beside Still Waters – Comfort for the Soul - Spurgeon
How Long O Lord? D. A. Carson, Baker Books, 1990.
How to Handle Trouble, Jay Adams, P & R Publishers, 1982.
Surprised by Suffering, R.C. Sproul, Tyndale, 1989.
Trusting God, Jerry Bridges, NavPress, 1988.
Why Does God Allow Suffering? Martyn Lloyd-Jones, Crossway Books, (1939,1994).