

SESSION 6

IF GOD IS GOOD,
WHY IS THERE
SUFFERING?



*What makes life better
when you feel lousy?*

God meets us in our suffering.



THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

“Why, God?”

Since the beginning of time people have asked “why” in the midst of suffering. Author Lee Strobel cites a national survey that asked, “If you could ask God one question and knew He would answer, what would it be?” The top response? “Why is there pain and suffering in the world?”*

Skeptics often cite the reality of suffering as evidence against the biblical view of God. After all, if God is loving but does not stop evil and suffering, then He must not be all-powerful. Skeptics say the only alternative is that God is able to prevent evil and suffering and does not do so, which means He does not love.

The Bible assures us God is both loving and all-powerful despite the suffering and evil that are part of life. Although we cannot always answer the “why” question about suffering in general—or every individual example in particular—we can know that God loves us.

* Lee Strobel, *The Case for Faith* (Zondervan, 2000)

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

Job 30:26-31; 42:1-6 (HCSB)

30:26 But when I hoped for good, evil came; when I looked for light, darkness came.

27 I am churning within and cannot rest; days of suffering confront me.

28 I walk about blackened, but not by the sun. I stood in the assembly and cried out for help.

29 I have become a brother to jackals and a companion of ostriches.

30 My skin blackens and flakes off, and my bones burn with fever.

31 My lyre is used for mourning and my flute for the sound of weeping.

42:1 Then Job replied to the LORD:

2 I know that You can do anything and no plan of Yours can be thwarted.

3 You asked, "Who is this who conceals My counsel with ignorance?" Surely I spoke about things I did not understand, things too wonderful for me to know.

4 You said, "Listen now, and I will speak. When I question you, you will inform Me."

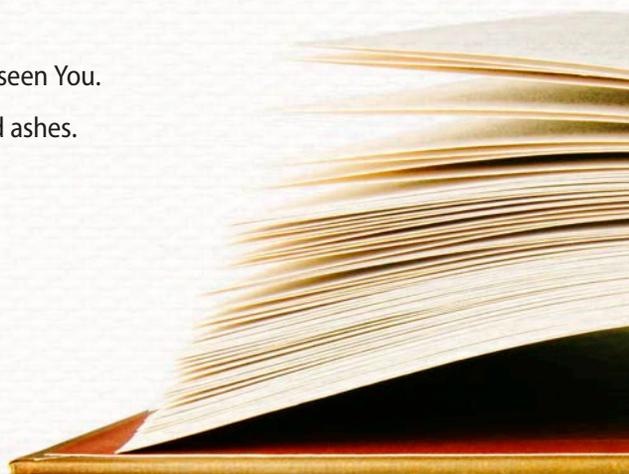
5 I had heard rumors about You, but now my eyes have seen You.

6 Therefore I take back my words and repent in dust and ashes.

Key Words

no plan of Yours can be thwarted (v. 2)—When God decides to do something, nothing and no one can stop Him, for He created everything and everyone.

repent in dust and ashes (v. 6)—The ancients recognized sitting in dust and ashes as a sign of repentance, contrition, or deep sorrow.



Job 30:26-31

God allowed Satan to afflict Job with intense suffering that included the loss of family, possessions, and health. Job cherished God more than these things, and he ultimately chose to trust in God's sovereignty and love. However, such faith did not come easily or instantly.

- ▶ His longings for good and light were seemingly mocked by evil and darkness (v. 26).
- ▶ He faced inner turmoil (v. 27).
- ▶ His skin was blackened and flaking off—likely by some dreadful disease (vv. 28,30).
- ▶ He cried out in desperation like the howl of a wild animal (vv. 28-29).
- ▶ The glad music of his life had turned into woeful mourning (v. 31).

What does this picture of Job's suffering teach us?

What is it we question about God when we read these verses?

QUESTION #1

1. All people experience suffering. Commitment to God and consistency of character don't exempt anyone from pain in this life.
2. Our suffering is not always the direct result of our personal sin. Suffering is a by-product of living in a world corrupted by sin. Sometimes the evil we experience is the result of others' sins.

Job was a man seeking to honor the Lord. Why, then, did he suffer? Why did God grant Satan even limited power to inflict intense pain on one of God's choicest servants? While we don't know all the answers to such questions, we can make inferences. One is that God's power and sufficiency are highlighted against the backdrop of our weakness and suffering (see also 2 Cor. 12:7-10). When you comprehend how far we have fallen short of God's desires for us, the ultimate question may change from "Why do we suffer?" to "Why don't we suffer more?"

WHAT DO I DO?

Based on Job, what do I say or do?

A neighbor suffers from chronic migraine headaches.

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A friend was down-sized and can't seem to land a job because of his age.

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Your niece is a paraplegic due to a hit-and-run accident.

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Job 42:1-3

Job 42 is Job's response to God's speech recorded in chapters 38-41. Job's speech reminds us that while we don't know the precise reasons for our suffering, we can be assured of God's power and knowledge.

God's questioning of Job in chapter 38 highlights the distinction between finite man and the infinite God. When we are ambushed by adversity, it is normal and acceptable to ask God questions and to tell Him we don't understand. However, it is never right for finite creatures to question the integrity of God.

Consider just two of the questions God posed in Job 38.

- ▶ Where was Job when God laid the foundations of the earth?
- ▶ Who "enclosed the sea behind doors," meaning who placed limits on the waves and the tides?

What has caused you to question God's wisdom or power?

QUESTION #2

With questions God illustrated the vast difference between a timeless God and a time-bound person. God's wisdom makes so-called human wisdom look like ignorance. Job willingly admitted that he had obscured knowledge by speaking of things he didn't understand, that were "too wonderful" for him.

George Müller, known for his work with orphans in England during the 19th century, has left a legacy of confidence in God. Speaking at his wife's funeral after 39 years of marriage, Müller said: "I seek by perfect submission to His holy will to glorify Him. I kiss continually the hand that has thus afflicted me." While we may never fully grasp the reasons for suffering, we can know God understands and cares.



How have you been changed by an encounter with God?

QUESTION #3

Job 42:4-6

Job extended his confession to include repentance. Suffering should draw us closer to God, rather than drive us away. Job repented of questioning God's goodness. After God spoke in chapters 38–41, Job was armed with a new awareness of God's character. He was sensitized to the seriousness of his error.

Not only did Job repudiate his earlier, flawed beliefs about God, but he also repented of them. Verse 6 gives us a picture of biblical repentance which involves a radical change in direction and perspective. The reference to "dust and ashes" indicates that Job adopted a genuine posture of humility. We find comfort and relief in acknowledging that we don't have all the answers, as we bow humbly before the One who does.

We have a God who comprehends our pain because He has experienced every kind of hardship we encounter. Jesus Christ understands what it is like to be betrayed by a friend, misunderstood by family members, falsely accused by enemies, and even to feel forsaken by our Heavenly Father. That is why we can talk confidently to God when we are suffering, certain that He empathizes with our situation. "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tested in every way as we are, yet without sin. Therefore let us approach the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us at the proper time" (Heb. 4:15-16).

Job's story concludes as he repents and is given a renewed understanding of God's sovereign power and goodness. Suffering can and should be a catalyst that drives us deeper into the strong and loving arms of the Father who loved us enough to sacrifice His One and Only Son for us.

What can we do to express faith in the midst of suffering?

QUESTION #4

LIVE IT OUT

Determine to meet suffering armed with God's love and presence, "casting all your care on Him, because He cares about you" (1 Pet. 5:7). Three of many ways to do this:

- ▶ **Refuse despair.** It's OK to grieve, but that doesn't mean we have to despair. Trust God's love and goodness.
- ▶ **Be there.** You often don't have to say a word, but your presence can be a great comfort to those suffering.
- ▶ **Help.** Connect with a friend or two to minister to families suffering through illness, hospitalization, or the death of a loved one. Develop a list of needs, and enlist other volunteers to help meet these needs as long as necessary.



God loves you and will meet you in your suffering.

A Shoulder to Lean On



Lacking confidence for the right words, people often shy away from parents in the midst of receiving a special needs diagnosis. After interviewing a number of mothers of children affected by special needs, common pointers emerge to help caring friends better engage these families.



To continue reading "A Shoulder to Lean On" from *ParentLife* magazine, visit BibleStudiesforLife.com/articles.



