

Seeing God Through Suffering

Intro: Suffering, in one form or another, is never very far away.

1. A Christian recently remarked: “My wife is terminally ill, my son got divorced, my daughter converted to Catholicism and I lost my job. What else can happen?!”
2. Is he unusual? No, these things are snapshots from the album of daily life.
3. God can seem very distant when times of suffering come. Many base their disbelief on the existence of suffering. They cannot reconcile with a good, loving, powerful God.

1. The Problems of Suffering

A. Suffering creates a “ripple effect”:

1. Great physical or emotional pain can spiritually undermine. Does God care? Why doesn't He do something about it?
2. Suggests fault, blame. **Ex:** Christian woman lost child, Christian told her God punishing her. But suffering is often the result of random event – Ecc 9:2, 11.
3. Creates uncertainty, insecurity. Suffering is often the result of a random event. We feel vulnerable. Will it happen again?

B. The question of “Why?”

1. Asked by godly men: Job 3:11-12, 16, 20, 25; Jer 12:1-2; Hab 1:13-14.
2. Not all “whys” are answered in the Scriptures: Why does God allow harmful elements to exist in our environment? Why does Satan exist? Why do random events occur if God is in control? Why do innocent people suffer?
3. There is a point at which “why” becomes moot. We must accept things as they are without explanation. Most important “whys,” those that immediately affect salvation, are answered.

C. We evaluate our circumstances by what we know about God, not vice-versa.

2. God and Suffering

A. God has given us much resource to prevent and alleviate suffering:

1. Moral laws, if followed, would solve **most** of the world's problems – Mt 7:12.

2. Civil government which punishes those who cause suffering – Rom 13:1, 4.
 3. Intelligence and freedom to manipulate environment to alleviate suffering: medical advancements, agricultural improvements, etc.
- B. God enables suffering to be a strengthening agent – **Rom 5:3-4**; Jas 1:2-4; 1 Pet 2:19- 20; 3:13-14; 4:15-16, 19; 5:10. Suffering reminds us of our frailty, focuses our minds on spiritual things, renews our dependence upon God, deflates our ego. Our **attitude** will determine whether our character is **ennobled** or **eroded** by it.
- C. God's participation in our suffering. God could not just say "I understand." God, in essence said, "If you have to endure it, then I will endure it with you." In Jesus God becomes personally familiar with suffering and death – Heb 2:10-18.
- D. God will recompense all at the final judgment – Rom 2:5-11.
- E. God's sovereignty as demonstrated to Job:
1. Job's struggle with God's fairness – Job 19:6-11; 23:1-7. From the depths of his suffering Job only sees God's severity, injustice. He wishes to argue his case.
 2. God does **not** explain the background of what has befallen Job; He ignores the circumstance and focuses upon His sovereign power and wisdom:
 - a. Jb 38-39 – God created all things by order, design. Who is man to criticize?
 - b. Jb 40-41 – God controls all. Man cannot even control wild beasts.
 - c. When directly challenged by God Job acknowledges God's greatness – Jb 42:1-6. Even from the pain and anguish of our suffering we have no right to fault God for His decisions on what He allows to happen.
 3. In order to charge God with wrongdoing we must know everything He knows and affirm that we can make a better judgment than Him. This from people who can't balance checkbooks, arrive on time or buy a new car w/o overpaying.

Conclusion: We must learn to **trust** God. There is abundant evidence that "*I will never leave you nor forsake you*" (Heb 13:5) and "*the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us*" (Rom 8:18).