

BAPTIST BIBLE SEMINARY

“A BIBLICAL VIEW OF SUFFERING”

A SERIES OF LESSONS SUBMITTED TO  
DR. JAMES KING  
TO FULFIL THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE COURSE  
CONTEMPORARY THEOLOGICAL ISSUES  
FOR A DOCTORATE OF MINISTRY DEGREE

BY  
TED WELCH

CLARKS SUMMIT, PENNSYLVANIA  
FEBRUARY 20, 2006

# INTRODUCTION TO THE ISSUE OF SUFFERING

Today I want to start a series of lessons on suffering? In this first lesson I want to introduce you to a number of different aspects in relation to suffering to get you thinking about this subject. I also want to let you know where we are headed in this series.

The purpose of this series is to help you to understand suffering a little bit better. I don't have all the answers, but neither does anybody else. We are all struggling with some issues in relationship to suffering.

But even though we will never have all the answers we can discover some answers that can help us deal with the issue of suffering.

You might be asking yourself:

“Why should we have a series of messages on suffering?”

“What is so important about this subject?”

“Aren't there a lot more serious issues to deal with?”

“Is this really a practical issue to be studying?”

So why is this issue of suffering so important?

## **THE SUFFERING ISSUE CAN BECOME ALL CONSUMING**

The issue of suffering may be an academic issue to most preachers or theologians. It is something that those with different religious perspectives debate back and forth in books and articles. To many this is just an academic study and a bit trivial.

But when some life changing accident or illness strikes a young and very active person or when a couple has a child that has some slowly crippling disease and they have to watch their child slowly get worse, this issue will become all consuming.

I was in a church not too long ago and a couple in that church had lost a son through an accident ten years ago. That couple to this day was constantly bringing up that accident and are still grieving over the lose of their son.

Philip Yancey in his book, *Where Is God When It Hurts*, tells the story of two strong and vibrant young people who suffered crippling and debilitating accidents.

One was **Brian Sternberg** a world class pole-vaulter who suffered an accident that caused injuries that would never allow Brian to walk again and would cause him severe pain every day. Yancey describes how this accident and the pain of it has dominated this family ever since it happened and they were still praying and working for some miracle to happen many years later.

The other example he gave was that of Joni Eareckson, who was a beautiful and energetic young woman who dived into the ocean and hit her head on a rock and crippled her for life. Yancey talks about how she has moved on with her life and accepted it, but every day of her life she has to live with this issue and face it as someone has to help her out of bed and with most tasks.

Harold Kushner talks about the importance of suffering in his book, *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*. He says,

There is only one question which really matters: why do bad things happen to good people? All other theological conversation is intellectually diverting... Virtually every meaningful conversation I have ever had with people on the subject of God and religion has either started with this question, or gotten around to it before long. Not only the troubled man or woman who has just come from a discouraging diagnosis at the doctor's office, but the college student who tells me that he has decided there is no God... They are all troubled by the unfair distribution of suffering in the world (Kushner, 6).

When Job was faced with the loss of his children, his wealth and his health, it dominated his life.. It was the one thing on his mind. It would not go away. It was the topic of conversation between Job and his friends. Can you imagine Job and his three friends talking about whether the death penalty was proper or whether we should pay taxes.

To many Jews the holocaust is the issue of issues that won't go away. Many Jews lost their faith through the holocaust. It is still all consuming to them. Elie Wiesel in his book, *Night*, describes the experiences that he went through in German concentration camps. He saw babies pitchforked, children hanged, weak men killed by fellow prisoners for a piece of bread. When Elie's train arrived in Birkenbau black smoke from the massive ovens where human were being burned filled the air and Elie smelled for the first time the smell of burning human flesh. He recalls:

Never shall I forget that night, seven times cursed and seven times sealed. Never shall I forget that smoke. Never shall I forget the little faces of the children, whose bodies I saw turned into wreaths of smoke beneath a silent blue sky. Never shall I forget the nocturnal silence which deprived me, for all eternity, of the desire to live. Never shall I forget those moments which murdered my God and my soul and turned my dreams to dust. Never shall I forget these things, even if I am condemned to live as long as God Himself. Never (Yancey, *Where Is God When It Hurts*, 91).

To many philosophers and atheists and thus many of our secular college students, the issue of suffering is a major issue. They can't believe in a God who allows so much suffering to happen to people.

Some of this material may seem academic and of not much value when you are not suffering, but when you suffer the whole situation changes. All other theological issues become smaller and this one becomes huge.

## **THE ISSUE OF SUFFERING AFFECTS OUR THEOLOGY**

Our views on suffering and God's part in that suffering ultimately affects our view of God and the honor and glory that we give to Him.

The question is often raised how a God of love and justice could allow so much suffering, but the issue of suffering also involves how a God of love and justice could punish people in hell forever. The answers to these questions ultimately will determine the kind of God that we serve and the glory that we attribute to Him or if we worship Him at all.

It is revealing that when the horrendous judgments of God are falling upon mankind in book of Revelation that the angels are praising God for the judgments:

“Thou art righteous... For they have shed the blood of the saints and prophets, and thou hast given them blood to drink: for they are worthy... Even so, Lord God Almighty, true and righteous are they judgments” (Rev. 16:5-7).

“Alleluia; salvation, and glory and honor, and power, unto the Lord our God: for true and righteous are his judgments: for he hath judged the great whore, which did corrupt the earth with her fornication, and hath avenged the blood of his servants at her hand” (Rev. 19:1-2).

But three times in Revelation 16 we find people upon earth who were suffering because of the plagues speaking out against God because of their suffering.

“And the fourth angel poured out his vial upon the sun; and power was given unto him to scorch men with fire. And men were scorched with great heat, and blasphemed the name of God, which hath power over these plagues; and they repented not to give him glory” (Rev. 16:8-9).

“And the fifth angel poured out his vial upon the seat of the beast; and his kingdom was full of darkness; and they gnawed their tongues for pain, and blasphemed the God of heaven because of their pain, and their sores, and repented not of their deeds” (Rev. 16:10-11).

“And there fell upon men a great hail out of heaven, every stone about the weight of a talent: and men blasphemed God because of the plague of the hail: for the plague thereof was exceedingly great” (Rev. 16:21).

Here are two different perspectives. One is a heavenly perspective by angels who are wiser than man and the other is by lowly men and women who curse God because of their plagues and will not repent of their sins.

I am afraid that the view of the people upon earth has become dominate upon earth. Many will not accept a God who causes pain and suffering. We are getting closer and closer to a general outlook of God revealed in the curses of these people upon earth in Revelation 16.

Some very strong words have been used to describe God if He really does send people to hell just as the Bible says that He will. John Hick is one of the more vocal.

But can it possibly be the will of the loving heavenly Father of Jesus' teaching that only that minority of men and women who have the luck to be born into a Christian part of the world can enter eternal life? This would not be the work of a God of limitless and universal love, who values all human beings equally, but of an arbitrary cosmic tyrant, more fit to be reviled as the devil than to be worshipped as God (John Hick, *Four Views on Salvation in a Pluralistic World*, 250).

Many Christians would also say the same thing about God for all the suffering that takes place upon earth including saints and sinners upon earth.

Richard Mayhue in his book *Divine Healing Today* interviews Joni Eareckson about her experience and Joni related the following incident:

I recently flew to a speaking engagement in St. Louis, and during the flight I got involved in a conversation with a young stewardess who just had the love of Jesus written all over her face. She was one of the most bubbly, effervescent persons I've ever met. She was obviously a new Christian in love with the Lord. She told me, "Joni, I just could not serve a God who did not want everybody healed—a God whose will is not to heal everybody (emphasis mine)" (Mayhue, *Divine Healing Today*, 125-126).

This whole discussion shapes our concept of what God is like and the honor and the glory that we give Him that this is a vital issue.

## **MANY SITUATIONS CALL FOR INSIGHT ON SUFFERING**

You need to understand that at some point in your life you will be facing one of the following situations and need to understand a few things about suffering.

If you are a pastor you may be called upon to counsel people in many different situations or try to reach people with the gospel who have a wrong opinion of suffering.

1. You develop some incurable disease and you will soon die, how are you going to react? Should you accept it and say the will of God be done or should you fight it and seek healing and expect God to heal.
2. You get a disease that will ravish your body and you will endure pain all of your life or for an extended period, how do you react?
3. A friend or family member or church member will have something terrible happen to them and you have to go and encourage and help that person, what are you going to say to that person?

How are you going to explain the situation? Should you try to explain? Do we really need to try and explain it? Who are you going to blame for this problem (Satan or God)? What is the process to recovery? Confession of sin? Faith in divine healing? Going to the doctors?

Tremendous mistakes can be made here. We can say with all confidence that the person will get better and they know it is really just hype and not true and our credibility will be destroyed or damaged.

You may get the family of a very sick person to trust God and not the doctors and the person dies and then they are then charged with involuntary manslaughter and if it was a child and the child died they can be charged with felony child abuse as is the case with the Larry and Alice Parker (Mayhue, *Divine Healing Today*, 17-23).

4. You may get into a discussion with an atheist and are seeking to help him to trust Christ and he can not believe in God because of all the suffering that goes on in the world. What are you going to say?
5. You may meet a Jew who has lost his faith in God because of the holocaust and again you are faced with what to say.
6. You have to counsel some terribly disillusioned parents because their teenager had trouble with drugs and has just taken his or her life and they are struggling to know why God would allow such a thing to happen.
7. You have to counsel a couple that believes that God is always willing to heal and that all sickness is of the devil and they prayed for a very sick child and that child died and their faith in God and the Bible are almost gone.

These are just a few of the situations that we have to face from time to time. As Christians what do we say about the source of suffering and the reasons for it.

Not only are issues regarding suffering important because so many struggle with finding answers regarding suffering and it has devastated their lives, but also because suffering is related to many other theological or doctrinal issues.

### **SUFFERING IS RELATED TO MANY ISSUES**

No doctrinal or practical issue can be isolated and made to stand on its own. Every theological and practical issue is related to many other theological and practical issues. It is the same with suffering.

We have already talked about the fact that our view of suffering determines how we view God and the honor and glory that we give to Him. But this issue is related to many other issues as well.

Suffering is related to many different theological and practical issues

1. It is related to God's love. If God is love, why so much suffering?
2. It is related to God's justice. If God is just, how can He allow good men to suffer and evil men to prosper.
3. It is related to man and his goodness. Many people question why good people suffer. We don't have a problem apparently with why obviously bad people suffer, but why do people we consider to be good suffer? Why do so many children have to suffer?
4. It is related to God's power. Some will say that God is not able to control the sinfulness and the suffering of man. God is limited. This is the position of Harold Kushner.

He says that God has given man a free will and when He did that God allowed man to do some things that He (God) could not control and there were some consequences that God was not able to control as well. God has limited Himself in when He gave man a choice.

He also says that God is not able to control the forces of nature. God has again limited himself in this area.

5. It is related to hell and eternal punishment. Some really don't see how a God of love could punish people in hell forever. Some like John Hick who were very conservative at one time in their lives have come to accept all religions as being good and able to bring us to God and have denied the deity of Christ and even His resurrection because he could not accept the fact that relatively good people in other religions would spend eternity in hell.
6. It is related to God's purpose and plan for us. Some would say that it always God's will to heal. They would say that the devil is behind all suffering and God does not want any of His children to suffer. We should seek the Lord for healing and if we have enough faith and are living right God will heal us.
7. It is related to prayer and how we pray. Some believe that God has given us unlimited power in prayer and we can pray for anything and God is obligated to answer and this includes healing.
8. It is also related to the matter of faith. Those that believe in divine healing quote James 5:15 "the prayer of faith shall save the sick" and so if we have right kind of faith God will heal. God is willing to heal, but it is up to us to have faith and any lack of healing is because of our failure to believe God.
9. Suffering is also related to redemption because the Bible says that we are saved through the suffering and death of our Savior upon the cross. Some would say that this makes Christianity a bloody religion and unaccepted to educated and modern man.

So the point is that this issue of healing and suffering has a lot of related issues associated with it.

This issue is huge in many ways. Many people may not have trouble with the incarnation and the trinity and the fact that God is everywhere present in the totality of His being, but they will struggle with why so much pain, how can God punish people in hell, why do good people suffer and bad people have it made.

## **THE DIFFICULTY OF THE SUFFERING ISSUE**

One of the major reasons for these lessons is to help us to see that this is a very complex issue and we don't have all the answers and we will never have all the answers.

But if you don't learn anything from these lessons, you need to know that this is a very complex issue and you need to be careful about jumping to conclusions and trying to oversimplify it.

This issue is complex especially when we get down to understanding why particular things happen to particular individuals. We can talk in general principles and they seem to satisfy, but when you get down to specifics the satisfaction soon fades. The truth is that we don't know why specific things happen as they do in specific instances. But we need to not let this destroy the general principles.

Much misunderstanding and many problems can develop when we don't understand some of these things.

1. Job, while suffering, could not figure out why he was suffering and he became to question God and His justice and goodness. God had a counseling session with Job and said, "Who is this that darkeneth counsel by words without knowledge? Gird up now thy loins like a man; for I will demand of thee and answer thou me" (Job 38:2-3). Clearly God was upset with Job for questioning Him and His ways with Job.
2. The situation was basically the same with Job's three friends. They basically said that Job was suffering because he had sinned. After dealing with Job the Lord turned to Job's three friends and said, "My wrath is kindled against thee, and against thy two friends; for ye have not spoken of me the thing that is right, as my servant Job hath" (Job 42:7-8).
3. Jeremiah struggled with why the wicked prosper (Jer. 12:1-2).
4. The people in Malachi's day thought that it was vain to serve the Lord because they were suffering so much (Mal. 3:13-15).
5. The Jews of Jesus' day thought that suffering was the result of sin. They tended to think that the wealthy are blessed by God and the poor and suffering are cursed by God. They tended to judge their relationship with God by their

circumstances in life. This is a very pathetic way of viewing life and our circumstances in life.

Jesus gave several parables that taught us that the rich are not necessarily blessed by God and the poor are not necessarily cursed by God. The story of the rich man and Lazarus in Luke 16 went against much of what was considered to be truth in Jesus' day. There were many instances where Jesus tried to correct this view (Lk. 13:1-5, Jn.9:1-2, Matt. 5:3-12).

6. The people on Melita thought Paul was a murderer when he was bitten by the snake and when he did not die they thought he was a god (Acts 28:3-6).
7. The complexity of the issue and the relevance of it is seen by the fact that God has given us much material in the Bible on the subject (Job, 1 Peter, Ecclesiastes, Habakkuk, Lamentations, Revelation).
8. The complexity of the issue is also seen by the fact that some monks and religious orders have given up worldly things to be holy. They have actually sought suffering to be holy.
9. People in Jeremiah's day were comparing the time in which they worshipped the Lord to the time that they worship the queen of heaven and decided to worship the queen of heaven because they had it better when they worshipped the queen of heaven than when they worshipped the Lord (Jer. 44:15-19)

The difficulty of the issue is seen by people in our own day and age and in all religions trying to explain it. There is much confusion.

## **THE ISSUE OF SUFFERING AND FAITH HEALERS**

The purpose of this series is to give some general answers to the issue. But we also want to take a closer look at the teachings of faith healers. With the spread of Pentecostal and charismatic teachings around the world, the issue of faith healing and the health and prosperity gospel are real issues in world missions.

Those serving the Lord around the world are going to have to help their people to think through the teachings of the faith healers. It is my opinion that faith healers are one of those groups who have tried to oversimplify the complexity of this issue and have jumped to come hasty and dangerous conclusions.

Bruce Barron in his book, *The Health and Wealth Gospel* documents the story of Hobart Freeman who at one time was a professor at Grace Theological Seminary but then began to preach Pentecostal faith healing theology. To him modern medicine and healing were adamantly opposed to each other. He reportedly told one woman that the moment she stepped into a doctor's office God would abandon her and she would burn in hell forever. Because of this teaching many of his followers died. Bruce Barron says of Freeman and his followers:

As Freeman wrote: 'It is only through trial and tribulation, when the powers of darkness seek to overcome us, that the life and power of Jesus Christ may truly be made manifest in us.' More recently Steve Hill, another son-in-law to Freeman, is said to have told followers that 'they don't know if they really have faith unless they're in a life-and-death situation, and they have to choose faith or life.' Standing firm in the face of death is the greatest and final trial, and the members of Faith Assembly were prepared to face it (Barron, *The Health and Wealth Gospel*, 27-28)

We shall not be able to examine all of their teachings and the implications of them, but we shall be applying some of the materials presented to this particular view of suffering and healing.

We shall be looking in depth at two particular views of the faith healers: all sickness, sorrow, suffering, pain and death are from the devil, and God is always willing to heal and make us prosperous.

We are going to be examining these two because they are so central to the teaching of faith healers. If all sickness and pain is of the devil, then of course it is logical to expect God to fight against and seek to overcome the works of the devil. Their whole theology basically rests upon these two things.

All the areas that we shall cover are in a sense related to these two areas. The lessons on the magnitude of the suffering issue relates because faith healers oversimplify the issue for all suffering is of the devil and bad. Therefore we shall see that ultimately God is responsible for all things that happen upon earth.

The lesson on the sources of suffering relates to this issue because we all suffer and it is not all of the devil, some of it is just from wrong decisions due to a lack of knowledge.

The lesson on the purposes for suffering relates because we find that there are good and legitimate reasons for suffering and it is not all bad.

The lesson of effectively handling suffering relates because the Bible's instruction on handling suffering are not all pray and the prayer of faith shall save the sick like in James. The instructions on suffering are a lot more complicated. If James instructions are meant to be the universal instructions on what to do when sick or afflicted, then there is no need for the rest of the instructions. It all has a bearing on the issue of faith healing.

## **OUR APPROACH TO THE ISSUE OF SUFFERING**

In our approach to this subject we are going to try and stick with what the Bible says as much as possible. The faith healers appeal to the Bible but yet are very selective in the verses that they use. They attempt to use only verses that confirm that God will heal and always wants to heal. Any verses that seem to teach otherwise will be avoided for they tend to cause doubt and to be healed, according to faith healers, people need complete faith, any doubt will be disastrous.

With this approach we are going to be saying some things especially in the area of the ultimate responsibility of suffering that are going to cause some questions. But we need to be careful in shaping Scripture to conform to human reason. If we have a God that we can understand then we don't have much of a God.

There is a tendency in this area to bring down God to our level and make God work in ways that we can understand. This is very dangerous theology. God ways are higher than our ways as far as the heavens are above the earth. (Isaiah 55:8-9). We shall never know or understand God's ways the way we should.

Romans 11:33 says, "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!" This sentiment is made several times in Scripture.

We shall seek to apply and understand God's Word no matter where that might lead us.

But, having said that, I recognize that I am not completely neutral as I approach the Bible. I have a tradition and a perspective that I bring with me to the Bible, but all of us are that way, but if the Bible says something, even though it is very difficult to accept, we must accept it and not seek to make it fit what we believe.

## **CONCLUSION**

I hope that by now that I have got you to thinking about this issue and have stirred your interest. I hope you see how complex the problem can be and how important it is to have a few basic answers.

I want to say again as we start this series that this is a complex issue and I don't have all the answers. I don't think any of us should think of ourselves as having all the answers.

I am not going to answer every question regarding suffering, in fact, I may stir up more questions that I end up answering. This is a complex issue and I hope to teach us not to jump to hasty conclusions or teach them. God is not passive in this whole discussion. His honor and glory and spiritual growth of His children depends upon the answers that we give in this area.

If nothing else I hope this first lesson will be a caution against simple and easy answers and hasty conclusions. I hope it will make us cautious when dealing with those who are suffering and what we say to them.

In this short series of messages I am not going to be able to cover every issue related to suffering or answer every question that we have raised in this introduction. Books have been written and it would take a book to cover every area. I hope that when preaching to teaching on this area that you will do your research well.

# THE MAGNITUDE OF THE SUFFERING ISSUE

It is important at this stage that we try to get a grasp on the magnitude of the suffering that we are talking about. Some very simple explanations can be formulated when you have a very simple understanding of the problem of suffering, such as the divine healers who say that all suffering or sickness is of the devil. That is a very simplistic answer.

When we talk about suffering most people are going to have a few things on their minds. But suffering means different things to different people. Suffering takes many different forms and with the multiplication of forms comes the multiplication of the complexity of the issue. In this lesson we just want to see the complexity of the problem so we don't jump to quick conclusions and simple solutions.

What are we talking about when we talk about suffering? We can get off to a wrong start by our understanding of suffering. We tend to think that some people suffer and that others don't, so we work out elaborate schemes to explain why some suffer and others don't.

But sooner or later we all suffer in one form or another. There are many different scenarios here. Honestly, some people suffer a lot more than others, there is no getting around this. Some suffer horrendous things. Some have it made in this life and suffer in the next, some suffer in this life and are blessed in the next (rich man and Lazarus). Some have health problems but have it made financially. Some don't have health problems but have little financially. Some seem to suffer in every possible way and others seem to have it made in every way. But we all suffer sooner or later.

There is an old Chinese tale about the woman whose only son died. In her grief, she went to the holy man and said, "What prayers, what magical incantations do you have to bring my son back to life?" Instead of sending her away or reasoning with her, he said to her, "Fetch me a mustard seed from a home that has never known sorrow. We will use it to drive sorrow out of your life," The woman set off at once in search of that magical mustard seed. She came first to a splendid mansion, knocked at the door, and said, "I am looking for a home that has never known sorrow. Is this such a place? It is very important to me." They told her, "You've certainly come to the wrong place," and began to describe all the tragic things that had recently befallen them. The woman said to herself, "Who is better able to help these poor unfortunate people than I, who have had misfortune of my own?" She stayed to comfort them, then went on in her search for a home that had never known sorrow. But wherever she turned, in hovels and in palaces, she found one tale after another of sadness and misfortune. Ultimately, she became so involved in ministering to other people's grief that she forgot about her quest for the magical mustard seed, never realizing that it had in fact driven sorrow out of her life (Kushner, 110-111).

Those in the divine healing business often quote 3 John 2, "Beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth." They

naturally draw from that verse that God wants all of His children to be healthy and prosperous in every area of life.

So they basically believe that God does not want any of His children to suffer in any way. They believe that basically all sickness, pain and poverty is of the devil and a result of sin, they do make some exceptions for God sometimes chastens His children, but they don't want the exceptions to be the rule and so they try to dismiss them. Because once you begin to admit some exception it works against faith and faith is what brings healing.

They don't even want us to pray when asking for healing, "Thy will be done," since that might cause us to doubt. We must believe that it is always God's will to heal for this fosters the faith that is necessary to heal (Duffield, *Foundations of Pentecostal Theology*, 373-374). We don't have to pray, "Thy will be done" because we know that it is always God's will to heal.

Also involved in this is the belief that everything good that happens is of God and everything bad that happens is of the devil. All suffering, pain, sorrow and poverty is not of God but of the devil and the result of sin and it is always God's will for His children to live above these things.

But as we shall see this is a very shallow understanding of suffering and prosperity. The forms of suffering are so diverse that we all suffer sooner or later and in one form or another.

In Ghana, West Africa the lorry cars are painted with sayings upon them. One of the sayings that I saw quite often was "Envy no man." What I got from that saying was that everybody has their particular problems and pains and blessings. We may see a man's blessings and envy him but we may never see the problems that he struggles with.

The purpose of this lesson is just to help us to see the magnitude of the problem of suffering and help us to see that there is no simple answers. The answer to the problem of suffering is very complex and it can not be reduced to some simple explanation.

In the next lesson we shall look at the sources of this suffering and who is responsible but right now we want to look at the magnitude of suffering that takes place upon earth to see the complexity of the problem of suffering and try to get us out of this search for some simple solution.

## **BIRTH**

It is interesting that life starts out with pain. For nine months a child develops in a nice warm home protected and shielded by a sac of fluid. Everything is soft and warm. Then all of a sudden he is pushed and shoved through a narrow opening into a cold world where he is slapped and made to cry.

Now he becomes hungry and thirsty. He dirties his diapers and develops a rash. He can't sleep wherever he wants and is totally dependent upon others for his needs and sometimes they are not too sympathetic towards his needs.

Life begins with suffering for the child and for the mother. It kind of sets the stage for life in general for the child and the mother in regard to that child, for that child will grow up with the greatest potential of hurting that mother and often does.

According to Harold Kushner, “Scientists have found ways of measuring the intensity of the pain we feel. They can measure the fact that a migraine headache hurts more than a skinned knee. And they have determined that two of the most painful things human beings can experience are giving birth and passing a kidney stone” (Kushner, *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*, 63).

### **DISEASES AND SICKNESS**

All of us at one time or another get sick with flu or a cold, we all suffer from time to time with relatively minor things. We all get headaches or have a tooth cavity or a rotten tooth that needs to be pulled. In some climates everybody gets sick sooner or later from malaria and similar diseases. Sometimes we suffer from indigestion and go the hospital because the symptoms of indigestion are so similar to a heart attach.

But others suffer from some disease all of their lives and some live with a horrendous amount of pain daily. Some catch some disease at some point in their lives and that sickness or disease may gradually claim their life or it may quickly snuff out their life.

In our day we can control some of these diseases but less than two hundred years ago millions of people died from one single outburst of a disease.

### **NATURAL DISASTERS**

There are tremendous natural disasters that cause thousands and hundreds of thousands of people to either loose their lives or their property every year. These natural disasters include hurricanes, tornadoes, floods, earthquakes, droughts, fires and tsunamis.

Living in Iowa we are very dependent upon the weather to grow corn and soybeans. There have been times when those who make a living by farming have lost just about everything or they have lost literally everything due to bad weather or good weather.

When we have good weather and everybody has a good crop then the prices fall. If the weather is too warm in northern Minnesota the loggers can't drive out over the lakes and bogs in the winter to do their logging and they won't make much money.

### **CLIMATE**

This is close to the last point, but yet a bit different. In natural disaster we have some unusual things that happen every once and a while and don't happen all the time. But under this point we want to see that people suffer just because of the weather on a lot more frequent basis.

Some places are very hot all the time or they can get very hot. When things are very hot we can become dehydrated and go into shock. When the sun is very strong we can

sunburn and be in a lot of pain just from being in the sun too long. People have died from over exposure to the sun and the heat and that over exposure to the sun can eventually cause skin cancer. At the present time I have had four little sections of my skins removed because as a teenager, I spent too much time in the sun.

Others in very cold temperatures suffer as a result of the cold. Ears, nose, fingers and toes are very vulnerable to very cold temperatures and many have had these members of their body freeze and it was a very painful process of thawing them out. Some people freeze to death because of the cold. When I was in Osceola, a woman from the nursing home next door to the church went out in the cold and froze to death right under my study window.

People living in very warm or very cold climates usually know how to deal with weather conditions, but still people do get caught off guard or don't take proper precautions.

### **THE ANIMAL KINGDOM**

In this whole discussion of pain and suffering we usually think of people. But it is not just people that suffer greatly, the whole animal kingdom is suffering. Paul says that the whole creation groans and is travailing in pain (Rom. 8:22). Animals kill and eat one another. Animals get sick and die. Animals die in floods, droughts, hurricanes and tornadoes. Animals suffer at the hands of human beings.

Ken Ham and Stacia Byers in an article in Creation magazine, describes how Charles Templeton, a one time associate of Billy Graham, gave up his faith. In this article they quote from his book *Farewell to God* and show some of his objections to the Christian faith. One of them had to do with suffering that man endures but also that which the animal kingdom endures.

Templeton, like Charles Darwin, had a big problem understanding how one could reconcile an earth full of death, disease, and suffering with the God of the Bible. Templeton states: 'Why does God's grand design require creatures with teeth designed to crush spines or rend flesh, claws fashioned to seize and tear, venom to paralyze, mouths to suck blood, coils to constrict and smother—even expandable jaws so that prey may be swallowed whole and alive?...Nature is in Tennyson's vivid phrase, "red in tooth and claw," and life is a carnival of blood.' Templeton then concludes: "How could a loving and omnipotent God create such horrors as we have been contemplating?" (Ham, "Creation ex nihilo" June 2000, 10)

### **PHYSICAL INJURIES**

There is probably not a person living that has not had a scraped knee or elbow or broken arm or leg. We cut ourselves or fall down and bruise ourselves. We hit a finger with a hammer. We suffer these accidents either as children or adults. Some of them happen around the house, at work or while we are trying to relax.

Some will require only a bandage, while others require a trip to the doctor or a stay in the hospital. Some of these injuries permanently disfigure us and maim us for life. Some of these accidents or injuries claims the lives of hundreds of thousands of people.

Hundreds of thousands of people die or are maimed for life in car accidents every year all over the world.

A few years ago a man by the name of Bob Hayes, who was a missionary in Ghana, West Africa with Baptist Mid-Missions, died in a car accident in Ghana along with his married son John and his single daughter. Before that another missionary with Baptist Mid-Missions died in a car accident in Ghana.

I personally have run a pickup stick through my hand when I was a boy, broken my collar bone twice once from riding a bicycle and other time from a fall from a sled, broke a tooth playing football, got stitches from getting hit in the face with a hoe and innumerable cuts and injuries from doing construction.

My son, Titus, has scars on his back and left arm from a spill of hot bacon grease when he was a small boy. Many carpenters are missing a finger or some farmers is missing an arm because of some accident. As we get older our bones get more brittle and older people often fall and break their arms or hips.

### **BIRTH DEFECTS**

In a category by itself is the area of birth defects. Some people are born with some genetic problem that will affect their life either mildly or severely. Some of this is caused by some sickness that the mother had while she was pregnant through no fault of her own or through drinking or drug use while pregnant. Some is just genetics.

We had a daughter that had a genetic problem and she lived only two weeks. We have six healthy children but Whitney had a genetic problem that was severe enough to take her life. Millions of children are born every year with some kind of birth defects.

### **CRIME**

All of us at some time or other will also suffer from crime. In some parts of the world it is almost a daily thing and you have to be very careful where you go and what you do. In some countries like in Ghana where we lived, they have bars on the windows, walls around their houses with glass on it, watch dogs, watchmen and several strong locks on the doors.

People are beat up by others over small trivial matters. People are killed to get their money or for revenge. Women and small girls are kidnapped and molested. Some 20,000 murders take place in America every year which amounts to almost 55 a day. There is probably twice that amount of attempted murders but the victim survived to tell about it.

After we had been in Ghana for only a few weeks we had someone break into our house while we were asleep and steal a fan, an accordion and a transformer. One of our missionaries there woke up in the morning to find all four wheels of his vehicle gone.

Millions of unborn children are slaughtered every year through abortion and many more children are molested or harmed in some way by adults or their peers.

## **CULTURAL SUFFERING**

We may not think of this as suffering but there is a lot of pain and suffering that comes because of ignorance, superstition, traditions and the culture of people around the world.

Some tribes in Africa are known for mutilating a woman to keep her from having sexual pleasure and thus being tempted to do something bad.

Dr. J. B. Williams in his little book, *Why Do the Heathen Rage*, documents with pictures how women in West Africa in the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century would put hot cloths upon the heads of their infant children until their head were red and then squeeze their heads between their knees and disfigure their heads to protect them from evil spirits.

In many culture not too long ago children were sacrificed to the gods to receive blessings from the gods.

The wives of a chief in some parts of Africa many years ago were buried alive with their dead husbands to accompany them in the next life. In some relatively poor countries they give money to the church to shorten their stay in purgatory or they give gold to build their temples to their gods thus increasing the poverty.

## **WAR**

The devastations of war are eminent and well documented. Millions of people have been devastated or destroyed because of war. Nations or groups of people greedily seeking to expand their territory and conquer others for wealth or fame have caused immense amounts of suffering.

Sometimes these wars have happened through racial prejudice.

The predictions in the book of Revelation tell us that one third of mankind will be destroyed in a battle or campaign (Rev. 9:15, 18).

## **POVERTY**

Millions of people around the world live in dire poverty and it affects many areas of their lives. It can affect their health or it can lead them to crime.

Some of them will starve to death because they don't have enough food. Poverty also leads to a great deal of shame in not having the things that other people have and being despised by others.

## **PERSECUTION**

We then have the persecution of some group by some other group either because of race or religion. When we think of this we often think of the killing of the Jews by Hitler in concentration camps.

We think of the killing of protestants by catholic and the killing of Christians by Moslems or Moslems by Christians.

But in Africa we have the killing of one tribe of Africans by another tribe. In Nigeria not too long ago there were tribal wars and thousands of people were killed in those wars.

We also have the persecution of people who believed in God by the communists.

### **GROWING OLD**

One of the things that all of us are going to have to face is the process of growing old and all the problems of it.

In the book of Ecclesiastes we are told to “remember now our Creator in the days of our youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them” (Ecclesiastes 12:1).

He then goes on to describe the process of growing old when things stop working the way they should. These days are called “evil days.”

There are many mental and physical problems associated with growing old. This is something that all of us face in life no matter who we are: rich or poor, godly or sinful.

### **MENTAL FEARS AND ANGUISH**

Then not only is there physical pain and suffering but there is also a certain amount of pain and suffering that involves our minds and thinking processes. It is a well known fact that many people suffering physically because of the way they think. Our thinking can affect us physically, but also a lot of suffering is purely mental.

Dr. Paul Brand was a medical technician in London during World War II. There he helped to treat men who had shown great courage. Men who had taken shrapnel or bits of grenade in their bodies and disregarded the pain to rush out under heavy fire to rescue their buddies. Some of these men had amputated limbs or enormous ulcers as a result of their wounds. Yet when it came time to get penicillin shots some of them would weep.

Strangely, these heroes lost all bravery when time for antibiotic shots rolled around. Penicillin, a new discovery then, was primitively manufactured in the huge vats of a London distiller. Impure and slightly noxious, the drug was too irritating for the veins to receive large doses, so small doses were injected every three hours. The injection stung like acid.

Brand recalls being on night duty when the nurse came in at two o'clock with the penicillin tray. Moments before she entered, the men would wake from sleeping. They would lie in bed, eyes wide open, some shuddering. As they heard her approach, some would emit rueful groans. Adult men—the same daring soldiers who had risked their lives on the battlefield—would sob uncontrollably as the nurse approached them with the needle (Yancey, *Where Is God When It Hurts*, 140).

Fear, worry, anger and bitterness can cause a tremendous amount of pain and suffering. We have a tendency to minimize this kind of suffering, but we should not. The suffering is real and it is painful. It can destroy us physically and in every other way.

## **GUILT**

Another thing that plagues mankind is guilt. This is a form of mental or spiritual problem, but is also very specific so we want to treat it separately. Here we are talking about guilt over things we have done that we think are bad. Sometimes this guilt is over things we have done or over things we have not done. It may be over things that we did not do well or really messed up.

Guilt can be a terrible thing and it causes many people every year to take their own lives, so it is not a minor thing. This guilt can be real because they have actually done bad things or it can be false.

People at times feel guilty over things that they should not feel guilty over. A child may think that he caused his parents to get a divorce. A parent looks away briefly and a child ends up hurting themselves severely and that parents lives with the guilt of one moment of lack of attention.

## **DEATH**

Here is an area that every human being has to face. We are all going to die at one time or other. It is going to come sooner or later. We do everything we can to postpone it as long as possible, but it is inevitable, except we are raptured out of this world by the Lord Jesus at His appearing.

Some go relatively peaceful in their sleep, but this is not the usual scenario. There is usually a lot of pain and a period of suffering that goes along with it. Sometimes this period of suffering goes on for weeks and months as in the case of cancer.

## **ETERNAL PUNISHMENT IN HELL**

Although this is a special area of suffering and is in fact due to the sinfulness of man, yet is relevant in this discussion. This is a very hot topic today and we are not going to give a definitive answer to it but we just wanted to include it in the overall subject.

If in fact people are sent to hell to be punished forever by God because of their rejection of Jesus Christ as their Savior and this punishment is comparable to a flame, this has got to be the greatest punishment of all.

No punishment upon earth compares to this. For every pain and sickness upon earth ends, it is temporal and does not last forever. But now we are talking about suffering and pain that lasts forever. We can defend temporal punishment in part because it is short lived and shall soon pass, but not this one.

And according to the Bible many are going to suffer this fate.

## **SATANIC OR DEMONIC SUFFERING**

Not only are people going to be tormented in the lake of fire but also evil spirits and Satan (Rev. 20:10, Mt. 25:41). We don't tend to think of them for we can't see or sympathize with them. But biblically we tend to believe that demons and even Satan at one time were angels worshipping and serving God. God created them with an ability to choose good and evil and they chose evil. But God did not provide salvation for them and they are doomed to that lake of fire (Heb. 2:14-16).

### **CONCLUSION**

Again I want to stress why we have gone through these things. This may seem like a strange way to go about understanding the matter of suffering by complicating it, but like I said, I think it is important that we get a rather complete view of all the suffering that takes place.

My point in this lesson is just to stress that this is complex. Our view of suffering and why people suffer has got to cover a multitude of matters. Any explanation that does not cover all these things and much more is not sufficient to be seriously considered.

This lesson is just to show that some solutions or explanations are way too simple and some are simplified in order to fit one model. My contention is that suffering is way too complex to fit one model.

As we shall see in the next lesson, the sources of suffering are many and varied. We can not simply say that the devil is behind all suffering or that sin is behind it all. If the devil is behind all then he has many of the attributes that only God has.

Are we prepared to say that the devil is behind every headache, every tooth cavity, every scraped knee or accident that causes a man to smash a finger and every murder. As we shall see the Devil can't be behind all of these things, He would have to be every where present, all knowing and all powerful to do all of these things.

Harold Kushner's explanation that nature is the cause of our suffering on earth and it is blind and therefore good people suffer as well as bad people, does not begin to cover eternal punishment. I am sure by some things that he said, he would not even accept the idea of eternal punishment.

Again I hope that through this lesson we can see that suffering in all of its fine details is very complex.

# CAUSES OF SUFFERINGS

In our attempts to understand and come to grips with suffering, we need to try and figure out what is the source or causes of our sufferings.

In the whole discussion of suffering, the two major debates come down to discussions of sources or causes of suffering and why there is so much suffering in this world and what might be the purpose behind it. Any discussion of suffering will not be very satisfying without some explanation in these two areas.

Sometimes we start with seeing no possible reasons or purposes for all the suffering and work backwards to there being no sufficient cause or source of suffering. Sometimes we start with the cause and argue back to the reasons for it.

In this series we are going to start with the causes or sources of suffering. Explanations of why we suffer logically follow once we figure out who, if anybody, or what is behind the suffering. If a personal being like Satan or God is behind the suffering, there is a purpose behind it. But if there is no God or Satan, then it is all chance and there is no reason for it. It is blind.

Once we figure out if Satan or God is behind it, then we have to figure out why they cause or allow so much suffering. With Satan it is easy, he is just evil. He delights in causing pain and suffering. But the issue becomes more complex with God, for God is good.

But here again we come back to the question that if God either causes or allows some or all suffering, why would He do that? We also need to try and figure out how much of the suffering God allows or permits.

We also have to figure out if God is ultimately in control of this world or not. Here we have to figure out if God has set life up like a game board and is not really involved or if God is truly involved in this world.

We also have to figure out if God is in control of Satan and the forces of nature.

The moment you bring personal beings like God or Satan into the issue of suffering, you are bringing purpose and you have to deal with questions that deal with why things happen.

In this lesson we shall look at some sources or causes of suffering. Our main purpose is to show neither God nor Satan are directly involved in everything that happens. They don't directly cause all things to happen. They may cause some. God may cause some and allow other things to happen. But man is also responsible for some of it.

Again I hope as we go through this lesson that we shall see that this subject is very complex.

Our purpose here is not to be exhaustive and completely thorough. Our purpose is to cause us to see that man's troubles and suffering can come from many sources and the answers are not always simple and easy.

So from whence does our suffering come?

## **WE SUFFER BECAUSE OF OUR OWN WRONG DECISIONS**

Most people relate suffering to sin. We sin and therefore we suffer the consequence of it, we pay for our sins, and that is true to some extent. This is clearly taught in the Bible, but not all suffering is due to sin. Sometimes we just make a wrong decision and that decision costs us dearly.

We try to travel on icy roads and end up in the ditch and wreck our car. Why did this happen? It happened because you made a silly mistake. We made an error in judgment, there is nothing in the Bible about traveling on snow covered roads.

We may eat too much or eat hot and spicy foods and end up with heartburn that keeps us up all night. Why did this happen? We like to eat hot spicy food and even though we know we shall pay for it later, we eat the stuff. It is bad judgment, even though we could be accused of gluttony here.

We may eat the wrong kinds of foods and clog our arteries and later in life we have open heart surgery or we die from a heart attack.

We build our house in a flood plain and every once and a while our house is filled with water.

We buy a lemon for a car and spend way too much money on repairs. These are all poor decisions that we make.

It is important that we realize that the bad decisions that we are talking about here are not sinful. We don't know much about cars and so we buy the wrong car and it does not last very long and we waste our money. We can even be an expert on cars and make wrong decisions when buying a car.

We take a job with a company and move a long ways and then the company closes right away. We buy a house when the costs of houses is very high and then after a few years the prices of houses is not very good and we have to sell and we lose money on it.

This is a part of life. We all suffer from wrong decisions and we suffer, not because we have sinned and disobeyed something that God has said in the Bible, but because we don't know all things. Nobody knows all things and so we all suffer a bit from wrong decisions made upon faulty information or knowledge. God is not judging us.

As parents we have to watch our young children all the time because we live in a dangerous world and kids fall down steps, get burned and choke because they have a tendency to put objects in their mouths because they don't know better.

Who is to blame? What is the source of some of the accidents and harm that comes from these things? God? Satan? I think we can blame our own ignorance and poor decision making. It is that simple.

God does not save us each and every time from the consequences of poor decisions that we make. If that was true there would be no incentive to try and make right decisions and every decision that we made everything would turn out ok.

Life would be completely different if God automatically overcame every wrong decision. Man would then become reckless and vain in what he did. We would always try to make it home even if the snow was three feet deep. We would go ice fishing when there was only an inch of ice. We would recklessly endanger our lives and the lives of others if God automatically saved people from the consequences of foolish decisions that they make.

Sometimes our choices do involve sin. Some of our wrong choices are sinful because they go against what God has said or principles that He has laid out in the Bible. We shall look at this later, but at this point, I hope we can agree upon the fact that since God did not make us robots to do everything He wants us to do and everything that is safe and prosperous, that we make wrong choices.

## **WE SUFFER THROUGH THE WRONG DECISIONS OF OTHERS**

Not only do we suffer because of choices that we make, but we also suffer because of wrong choices that others make. This is especially true in a family situations. Again under this point we are not talking about sinful decisions.

You are a child at home and your dad starts a business which he thinks will be very profitable to him but instead he loose a lot of money and the family struggles financially from that point on. Maybe the children will not have funds to go to college. All in the family will suffer because of that decision.

A parent is watching a child and for a few seconds they are distracted and that child falls down the steps or into a swimming pool or is hit by a car. That parent did not do anything sinful. They have watched that child for 365 days a year for 10 years and yet they get distracted and the consequences are horrific. They have been distracted before and nothing bad happened. If they had known the dangers they would have watched the child better.

Here again nobody knows all things so most people are going to make wrong decision based on wrong information and due to ignorance and their decisions also affects others. There is nothing we can do about these decisions because nobody is all knowing.

There may be principles in the Bible that would help us in some of these situations to make the right decisions. In Proverbs we are told that in the multitude of counselors there is safety (Prov. 15:22). Maybe if we had sought enough counselors and prayed more about the situation maybe we would not have made the wrong decision. But even if we

did seek a lot of people's advice, it would not guarantee that we would make the right decision. We may have to choose between two or three views that seem right to us.

If every person knew the Word of God perfectly it would eliminate some of this but none of us know the Word of God perfectly nor do we have a crystal ball to help us make the right decision each and every time. Sometimes we pray and pray about things and really in the end don't know for sure if we are doing what God wants us to do or not.

Besides this, sometimes we have to make a decision right away and it is a life or death situation and no time to seek counsel and we may make the wrong decision or someone else makes the wrong decision and others get hurt as in a traffic accident.

## **WE SUFFER BECAUSE OF BAD THINKING PATTERNS**

Under the last point we saw that we suffer at times from a wrong decision. We try to make it home in a snow storm and wreck the car. We get distracted from watching a child and that child gets hurt. That was a poor decision that we made and we suffer the consequences because of it.

But here we are talking about patterns of thinking and also behavior that comes from those patterns. Sometimes these can be sinful and sometimes they are not, but generally speaking these would tend to be contrary to what the Bible says.

Take for example: we can be blessed in a hundred ways and should be rejoicing and praising God for His goodness, but because we have a few problems or the way we look at the problem we get discouraged and feel sorry for ourselves and think we are suffering and may even wish to die.

Some great men in the Bible like Moses, Elijah and Jonah all wished to die because of problems that they were facing. They thought those problems were too great for them and they did not want to continue any more.

We also tend to be either negative or positive in our thinking. I remember once a Christian psychologist once spoke in our church. He showed a picture of a man pulling a large horse cart stacked high with some cargo which was covered with a tarp. He then asked us to write down what we thought the picture was saying. Some thought that he was working hard and suffering for some other person. He was working hard making a living and was just getting by. I was in this group sorry to say.

Then he asked how many had some other view. He asked how many had thought about the man not laboring for someone else, but for himself. He had a large crop and was taking it to market to sell and actually it showed he was going to be rich.

One way of thinking was negative and other was positive. The point was that we either tend to be positive or negative in our evaluations of our lot in life and what life is all about.

The point here is that a lot of suffering goes on because of bad thinking patterns. If we tend to be negative, it will affect our whole outlook on life.

Some women think they are suffering because they are married and others think they are suffering because they are not.

Some think they are suffering when they have children and others agonize over the fact that they don't have any children.

I worked with a man by the name of Jerry one time who was a big football fan and if his team lost on Sunday, he was depressed on Monday. He was a very bitter man who had a lot of bad things to say about many different things.

If we are constantly looking on the dark side of life we are going to end up hating life, having pity parties and being miserable. God does not want us to live like this (Ps. 68:3, Ps. 100, 1 Thes. 5:16-18, Col. 3:15, Eph. 5:19-20, Heb. 13:15).

But I think too that we can be overly optimistic too when we should not be and it hurts us. Some people because they are so positive and optimistic are very good at taking risks and taking those risks can cause a lot of damage as well.

I think we can error on both sides of this issue.

### **WE SUFFER BECAUSE OF OUR OWN SINS**

God has told us how to live and God's way is always best. As we obey Him we are blessed and tend to prosper and as we disobey Him we suffer (Josh 1:8, Psalm 1:1-3, Prov. 3:13-17).

There always seems to be a consequence for disobeying God. This may not be direct chastening by God but just some natural sowing and reaping type of suffering that God has built into life.

Proverbs outlines for us many of these principles. To have friends we must be friendly (Prov. 18:24). To succeed in life we must be diligent and work hard (Prov. 22:29, 24:30-34). The principles here apply to all men and are built into the structure of life. God seems to attach certain sorrows and pains to certain sins so that when we do them, we will smart for it and not do it again.

I am not going to say a lot about this, because this is so obvious. There are a myriad of passages and examples of this in the Bible and in life. All people and basically all religions generally speaking recognize this principle that when we do good that good comes from it and when we do bad that bad consequences follow.

We see it every day in the papers and it is taught in some form or fashion by every religious and even pagan groups. We know that there are certain consequence associated with certain bad things that we do.

## **WE SUFFER BECAUSE OF OTHER PEOPLE'S SINS**

James 4:1-2 says, "From whence come wars and fightings among you? come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members? Ye lust, and have not: ye kill, and desire to have, and cannot obtain: ye fight and war, yet ye have not, because you ask not."

I don't think this passage is talking about wars between nations. It is talking to people and their fighting and warring that takes place between them as individuals. But what is true about individuals is also true of nations. Nations are led by individuals who have some of these motives.

The suffering and ordeal of war comes about because of the lusts of wicked men. We suffer because of our own sins but we also suffer because of other people's sins. Again there is no real point here to go into a lot of detail, this is obvious.

David suffered because Saul was jealous of him. Abel was killed by his brother Cain. Joseph suffered at the hands of his brothers.

Millions of people every year are victims of crime, due to no fault of their own although we tend to blame the victims for being in the wrong place at the wrong time.

Drunk drivers kill or hurt thousands of people every year. Terrorists cause tremendous suffering.

Government leaders cause their people to suffer because of their leadership (Prov. 29:2). Religious leaders cause their own people to suffer because of their teachings (Matt. 23:4).

Many Christians suffer at the hands of unbelievers and other religious groups or the communists.

We need to realize that we live in a world with other sinful people and we are going to suffer as a result of their sins just we cause other people to suffer because of what we say or do.

We need to expect this and there is nothing that we can really do about it or to prevent this. We just need to recognize it and seek to protect ourselves as much as possible from some of it.

And here we must point out that mankind is exceedingly sinful, at least this is the picture of mankind that we get from the Bible. Jeremiah 17:9-10 tells us, "The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked: who can know it? I the Lord search the heart, I try the reins, even to give every man according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings."

Without the foundation that mankind is exceedingly sinful much of the suffering of mankind does not make sense.

## **WE SUFFER BECAUSE OF SATAN'S INFLUENCE**

Here again we are talking about something that is very obvious from the Bible. If we don't accept the Bible and the fact that there is a devil, then we are really going to have a hard time explaining a lot of suffering that goes on in this world.

I believe that is part of the reason why Harold Kushner has such a hard time explaining the evil in the world, because in his book he does not mention the devil one time. He sees everything that happens either coming from God or nature and he can only explain evil by attributing it to the laws of nature because God is good and He will not hurt good people.

Once we admit that there is a devil who is incredibly evil, then some of the evil makes more sense, even though we have to explain why God would allow him to do so much evil.

Those involved in the faith healing movement have a lot of documentation to show that suffering is of the devil and it is all biblical. The problem is that they say that all sickness, sin, suffering, pain and death are of the devil. They will admit that Satan tempts us to sin and God judges us, but in the end it is all of the devil.

I don't go to that extreme but I have to admit that the devil is behind a lot of bad stuff that happens upon earth.

The devil tempted Adam and Eve to disobey the Lord and brought the judgment of God upon mankind and a lot of suffering is due to the affects that our sin has upon others. The very nature of man was changed at that moment and with it came a lot of suffering.

The devil tried and tested the faith of Job. Job lost his children, his wealth, his respect and his health. All of his suffering was directly caused by the devil.

Those possessed by demons and the devil wept and tried to destroy themselves (Mk. 5:1-5). We read of the Lord Jesus that He went around healing all that were oppressed by the devil (Acts 10:38). Satan causes his people to persecute and kill God people (Rev. 2:10).

The devil is a liar and a murderer (Jn. 8:44). We read in 1 John 3:12 that Cain was of the wicked one and slew his brother. In John 8:44 Christ is speaking to the scribes and the Pharisees and said, "Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do." The devil put it into the heart of Judas to betray the Lord Jesus. He put it into the heart of Ananias and Sapphira to lie to the church (Acts 5:1-11).

He appears at times as a messenger of light (2 Cor. 11:14) and his forces are active in spreading religious teaching which is false (1 Tim. 4:1). According to Revelation 12:9, he has deceived the whole world and some of this leads to hell.

There is no question about it that the devil is responsible in a sense for much of the evil that takes place upon earth. But it is our contention as we shall see that the devil can not be responsible for every bad thing that happens.

He is not that powerful or wise. Some of the evil, yes; all of the evil, no.

### **THE SAINTS SUFFER BECAUSE OF GOD'S CHASTENING**

There is a suffering that comes as a natural result of sins, the sowing and reaping principles outlined in Proverbs and then there is the direct intervention of God to chasten His children (Heb. 12:5-11).

Just as parents often chasten and rebuke their children, so God chastens His children for the purpose of getting them to do what is right and to be blessed.

In Hebrews 12:6 we find that God chastens those that He loves and He scourgeth every son whom He receives. That means that at some time or another all of us will be on the receiving end of God's chastening. Even the great apostle Paul had a thorn in the flesh to keep him humble (2 Cor. 12:7). These times can be very painful. Scourging was a very painful experience.

These times of chastening will help us to draw closer to the Lord and get things straightened out and it ends up being a very profitable time in our lives (Heb. 12:10-11).

But sad to say, some don't draw nigh to God and some don't learn and God has to continue to deal with them and even possible to take them home to glory. Some get bitter and stop loving and serving the Lord.

Every parent knows how much correcting and discipline it takes to raise a child. Some children take a lot of discipline and correction. It is the same with God. He is actively involved in the lives of His children to cause them to honor and glorify Him and to be blessed in this life.

Faith healers tend to downplay this aspect. They might say things like "God sometimes chastens His children." This makes it sound like it rarely happens, whereas Hebrews 12 says that God chastens every son whom he receives.

### **WE SUFFER BECAUSE OF THE PROVIDENCE OF GOD**

I have been blessed to be born into a country and even into one area of that country where things are relatively peaceful. In rural Iowa we don't have a lot of racial tension, gang violence or even crime. Some still, to this day, leave their homes unlocked.

I also live in a period of history where I don't have a war on my doorstep and I have to fight just to live or to protect my family. I am blessed to be born in this country at this particular time.

Others have not been so fortunate. In the nation of Israel it seems that they have struggled and have had to fight for their existence. Other people living in jungles have had to fight to stay alive. If I was born at another time and place I would have to fight most of my life just to stay alive.

In Ecclesiastes 3:1-8 we find that there is a time or season for everything under the sun: a time to be born and a time to die, a time to plant and a time to reap, a time to kill and a time to heal, a time to break down and a time to build, a time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance, a time to keep silent and a time to speak, a time to love and a time to hate, a time to war and a time of peace. As I look at a lot of these things, what I have determined is that my life is governed a lot by providence. Most of those things on that list are not under my control or under my control completely.

I do not control when I am born and when I die. I do not control the weather and determine when to sow and when to harvest. I do not control when to war and kill and when to be at peace, that is determined by circumstances that I find myself in.

If I lived in the time of David or Gideon, I would have to fight and kill. Today I don't. Millions of people suffer due to the time and the place where they were born. They weep and mourn because of it.

Ultimately many of my blessings in life depend upon the providence of God, the time and the country in which I was born.

## **THE WORLD SUFFERS BECAUSE OF GOD'S JUDGMENT**

God chastens His children to correct them and to make them better children, but God simply punishes the world for their sins.

This happened several times in the Bible in cases like the flood, Sodom and Gomorrah, and the destruction of the Canaanite people by Israel. There are also many individual cases where God judged people for their sins and they died. God is not seeking to correct them and get them to do what is right, but He is punishing them.

God also instituted human government after the flood also for the punishment of violent people (Gen. 9:5-6). According to Romans 13:4, government is the minister of God to execute wrath him that doeth evil.

The Bible is very clear also that unsaved or wicked people shall suffer the wrath of God upon their lives in eternity in the lake of fire.

Again the evidence here is so overwhelming that I am not going to take any more time to expand on this point.

## *CONCLUSION*

Again the main point of this lesson is to show that personal beings are involved: man, God and Satan. We have seen that man basically suffers because of his own decisions whether those decisions are sinful or not and because other people's decisions whether those decisions are sinful or not.

We also suffer because we have an adversary walking about seeking whom he may devour (1 Peter 9:8) and he causes lots of problems.

Mankind, including the saints, suffers also at the hands of God. God chastens His children and God judges the world.

The sources of our suffering are not too hard to trace. It is a relatively simple matter.

Most, if they believe the Bible, recognize these sources but people struggling with why suffering happens will not struggle in this area. The more difficult questions involve why. Why do particular things happen to particular people? Why do hurricanes devastate thousands of people?

But before we get to specific reasons or purposes behind suffering, we have to come to grips with God's part in all of this.

How much is God involved in all of this? That is the topic for the next lesson.

# THE ULTIMATE RESPONSIBILITY FOR SUFFERING

In the last lesson we talked about the sources or causes of suffering. We talked about several different sources: ourselves, other people, Satan and God.

That still leaves a lot of questions unanswered.

It is easy to point to these sources and to accept them as sources of suffering, but is Satan out doing his own thing and not under the control of God? We know that during the millennial kingdom that Satan will be bound and not have an influence upon earth, but what about now?

Can Satan do whatever he wants or is he at the present time also under the control of God? Does God set limits on what Satan can and can not do? Is man free to do as he pleases?

Are all of these sources on an equal basis and no one overseeing the whole thing?

Do the forces of nature work independently of God? Are people out of control and God can not control what they do?

Can not God prevent a lot of suffering from happening? Can and does God even use what Satan does for the accomplishing of good?

This is what we want to consider in this lesson. Who ultimately is responsible for suffering and pain, sickness and death and basically all things that happen?

You probably have already guessed that it is my contention that God is ultimately in control of what happens. He either allows or actually causes all things to happen. He is in control.

This is a necessary step between our lesson on sources or causes of suffering and the purpose for suffering. I believe that the ultimate purpose for suffering comes from God and His infinite wisdom. He either allows or causes all things to happen and He either causes or allows all things to happen for a reason.

In the next lesson we shall look at some possible good reasons why bad things happen. But before we get to that lesson we have to consider if God is in control.

If God is in control He is responsible to some degree, if God is not in control then He is not responsible, but then things are chaotic, purposeless and meaningless.

Some would readily admit that suffering is purposeless. They can't see any purpose, any rhyme or reason to it, so it must be random, it must be by chance or accidents or all of the devil.

This is not what the Bible says. I believe the Bible says that God is in charge and He either allows or causes all things to happen. We shall study this in this lesson and then in the next lesson we shall try to find out some of the reasons why God allows bad things to happen and causes other bad things to happen.

Ultimately all that happens upon earth is under the control of God.

## **GOD COULD HAVE PREVENTED THE FALL OF MAN**

All those who believe the Bible believe that most of our troubles with sin and the suffering that it causes comes as a result of the fall. Satan tempted Adam and Eve and they sinned and became sinful and passed that sinful nature on to their children and thus the whole human race was corrupted and suffer the consequences of sin. But who ultimately is responsible for the fall of man?

**God Did Not Have to Create.** The simplest solution to this whole mess is that God, knowing as He did, that mankind would sin and all the sorrow that would follow did not have to create angels or mankind. It would have been a perfect and beautiful place. God could create the animals with instincts to eat grass and fruits and without a need to eat flesh and it would have been a beautiful place. God could have walked in the cool of the garden and enjoyed His creation.

**God Did Not Have To Give Satan and Man The Ability to Choose.** It is plain from the temptation and fall of Adam and Eve that Satan fell before Adam and Eve. God could have prevented the fall of Adam and Eve by not giving angels and man the ability to choose right from wrong. This would have created a heaven upon earth. But when God decided to create the angels and man with a free will then the possibility and really the inevitability of sin and sorrow came. Because if God gives man a choice, sooner or later someone is going to sin and that sin will infest the lives of millions of other people just like Adam and Eve's sin did.

**When Satan Sinned God Could Have Destroyed or Confined Him.** Not only did the Lord not have to create Adam and Eve and Satan with the ability to choose right from wrong, when Satan fell the Lord could have destroyed him. He could have confined Him like in the millennium. He could have kept him from tempting Adam and Eve.

**When Adam and Eve Sinned God Could Have Destroyed Them.** We know that the Lord started over after the flood with a godly seed. We know that every sinner will be destroyed at the return of Christ and God will start all over with godly people in the millennium. In these two cases the people still had a sinful nature and the new beginning was only short lived. But God could have started over with a innocence and godly couple just like Adam and Eve before the fall.

**God Could Have Created Adam and Eve So That They Did Not Pass A Sinful Nature on to Every Human Being.** Adam and Eve were created innocence and without sin. But when they sinned a change took place in them and in their children. Now every child born into this world goes astray as soon as they are born speaking lies (Ps.

58:1). We are conceived and shaped in iniquity (Ps. 51:5). God could have made it so that everyone sinned personally and were made sinners by personally sinning.

The long and the short of this matter is that the Lord could have prevented the sin and the suffering. But God in His infinite wisdom, love and holiness allowed Satan and man to sin and bring upon us all the suffering we face in this world and the next.

### **GOD HAS SATAN UNDER HIS CONTROL**

There is much in the Word of God that says that God has Satan under His control. While Christ was upon the earth, Satan and demons were under the control of Christ. In Job Satan is under the control of God. In fact Job seems to indicate that the devil has to report in to God and give an account of what He is doing (Job 1:6, 2:1).

In the millennium we know that Satan is bound. In the tribulation we find that it was given unto the Antichrist to make war with the saints and to overcome them: and power was given him over all kindreds, and tongues and nations (Rev. 13:7). In 2 Thessalonians 2:7 we find that the Holy Spirit through the church is restraining iniquity until He is taken away. In Colossians 2:10 we find that Christ is the head of all principality and power, just as He is the head of the church (Col. 1:18).

All this seems to indicate that the devil is not out of control, but God has in a sense limited what the devil and his forces can and can not do.

### **GOD HAS BROUGHT CURSES BECAUSE OF THE FALL**

After Adam and Eve sinned the Lord said, "I will multiply thy sorrow and thy conception, in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children: and thy desire shall be to thy husband and he shall rule over thee" (Gen. 3:16).

God turned to Adam and said, "Cursed is the ground for thy sake: in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life: thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee..in the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread" (Gen. 3:17-19).

I don't want to get into a detailed analysis of these verses but they are basically saying that because Adam and Eve sinned God was going to make life difficult for them and their children. Some have indicated that this was really a blessing to keep man busy and occupied for too much time on a sinner's hand will get him into trouble.

God also subjected mankind to death. The body has the ability to replace cells. When we are young the body replaces every cell frequently as we are growing up. But as we get older the process slows down and the body does not replace cells as it once did and we grow old.

The point is that because of the sin of Adam and Eve we all became subject to death. God would not let them eat of the tree of life and live forever and man's age was diminished from around 1000 to around 75 years.

God cursed the ground and made life tough for mankind and also brought into this world the principle of death.

## **GOD HAS BROUGHT DESTRUCTION UPON THE WORLD**

God brought the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, the flood and the destruction of the Canaanites.

God shall bring tremendous suffering on mankind during the tribulation and Christ shall tread the winepress of God's wrath in the end times.

## **GOD CREATED VIRUSES AND GERMS**

In the modern world we know that most sickness and diseases are caused by germs and viruses. What is the source of these viruses? Did they evolve?

Those who believe that God created all things believe that God must have also created germs and viruses. In Isaiah 40-46 the Lord says several times to the nation of Israel that He is God and only He is God, beside him there is no God or Savior. He created and no one else (Isaiah 44:24).

God is the creator and the only creator as Isaiah tells us. If there are viruses and bacteria that cause disease and bring death and suffering it is because God created those viruses and bacteria.

All the sicknesses that are caused by germs and viruses ultimately come back to God who created those diseases. How they are passed and who gets the disease can be debated but I think we have to say that God created the germs. These are terribly complex living organisms.

I don't think Satan has the power to create.

## **GOD SAID HE WOULD CURSE ISRAEL**

It is obvious from Deuteronomy 28:1-14 that if the Jews obeyed the Lord that the Lord would bless them and from Deuteronomy 28:15-28, which is a much larger section, if they disobeyed the Lord that He would curse them. If you look into the OT history and prophetic books you will find that Israel repeatedly disobeyed God and God judged them.

Almost every prophet of God was rejected by the nation of Israel.

I know you have to be very careful here but the nation of Israel has suffered horrendously in biblical times because of their sins. It is hard to determine how much of the suffering of modern day Jews is from Satan, how much is of wicked man and how much is of the Lord. But the principles are frequently laid out there, "Disobey me and you are cursed." God condemned some nations in Bible times because God used them to punish Israel but they took the punishment way too far and enjoyed it far too much.

I am not prepared to say how much modern day problems are from the Lord but clearly horrendous sufferings came upon Israel by the hand of the Lord. In the book of Lamentations Jeremiah is lamenting the sufferings that the Lord has brought upon Israel because of their sins. People became so hungry that the merciful woman boiled their own children to eat (Lam. 4:10). The fact that God can and has protected Israel from evil men and nations is brought out in Esther and other OT stories. If God did it then, why not now?

### **GOD WAS RESPONSIBLE FOR JOB'S SUFFERINGS**

In the story of Job it is very interesting that even though it is clear that Satan caused the death of Job's children, removed his wealth and status and brought the sickness upon Job that the Lord took responsibility for it (Job 2:3, 42:11).

Satan is the one doing the dirty deeds to Job, but the Lord is taking the responsibility for it. Why? Because the Lord gave the devil permission to do it and if the Lord gave the devil permission then the Lord is responsible. The Lord could have prevented it by not allowing Satan to do what he did to Job.

There is also the matter of the control of the Sabeans (1:15), the fire of God coming from heaven (1:16), the control of the Chaldeans (1:17) and the control of the great wind (1:19). Did Satan do all of these things personally and without the help of God? Does Satan control the fire of God, possibly lightning, and the wind? How much of this did Satan do on his own and how much did God have to help him. God said in Job 2:3, "Although thou movedst me against him, to destroy him without cause." God in that verse seems to say that it was God's power doing some of these things against Job.

We may not be clear on this last point, but ultimately God gave the go ahead for Satan to tempt Job and took responsibility for it.

### **GOD WAS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE DEATH OF CHRIST**

In Isaiah 53 we read that the Christ was smitten of God and afflicted (vs. 4), that it pleased the Lord to bruise him (vs. 10) and God would make his soul an offering for sin (vs. 10). Acts 2:23 says of Christ, "who was delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain." Jesus was delivered into the hands of wicked men by God. Christ said that Pilate could do nothing against Him unless God allowed him to.

Christ said that He could call 10,000 angels and He could have been delivered. Christ came into the world to suffer and die for our sins. God is clearly in charge of this situation, yet we find that Satan has a part in it. Judas was directed by the devil to betray the Lord Jesus.

Jesus said when it came time to be betrayed and crucified that it was by the power of darkness. Christ said that it was good for the man who betrayed him if he had never been born.

Peter says to the Jews on the day of Pentecost that they by wicked hands had crucified and slain him. Christ died a horrendous death at the hands of sinful men who were influenced by Satan but yet God was in charge of that whole situation. God could have delivered His beloved Son from this situation, but that was not God's will.

## **GOD CONTROLS THE FORCES OF NATURE**

We saw in the previous section that mankind suffers because of weather conditions, blizzards, the heat and the cold, tornadoes, hurricanes, tsunamis, droughts and floods. Who ultimately is responsible for these things?

There is much in the Bible that speaks to the fact that God is in charge of the weather. Christ said that God causes his sun to rise on the evil and on the good and he sends the rain on the just and the unjust (Matt. 5:45). God in the OT caused the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah through natural causes and He brought the flood upon mankind. In the book of Revelation we find the Lord bringing all kinds of natural judgments upon the world.

In many places in the Bible, especially the OT, we find that the Lord is in charge of the rains and storms. Some of this language is poetic in nature and we need to be careful in taking it in a literal sense, yet the truth is obviously revealed through these poetic forms that God is in charge of this world. God rules and reigns and is in charge of what happens, even in realm of nature (Nahum 1:3-5, Psalm 104).

In God's discussion with Job, God shows His power and wisdom by showing that He created all things and He is in charge of the weather (Job 38-41).

God frequently showed His power over the forces of nature in the plagues of Egypt, the parting of the Red Sea, the giving of Israel quails in the wilderness, protecting Daniel in the lion's den, causing the fish to swallow Jonah and sending the poisonous serpents to bite the children of Israel.

In the NT God's power over the forces of nature are seen by Jesus walking on water, the stilling of the storm and the earthquake that opened the prison doors for Paul at Philippi.

There is a debate whether the forces of nature act independently of God and forces that He has established and are operating on their own or if the forces of nature are really just how God acts and the forces of nature or actually God working consistently and immediately to keep things running smoothly. I am not going to answer this question definitively, but either way God is in charge of the forces of nature.

Harold Kushner does not believe that God is behind all the bad things that happen but that they are principles that God has established and they act blindly. He does not even believe that God interrupts the laws of nature. God is not in control of the forces of nature. He actually believes that nature is basically responsible for all the bad things and not God, for God does not control nature.

Laws of nature treat everyone alike. They do not make exceptions for good people or for useful people...Laws of nature do not make exceptions for nice people. A bullet has no conscience; neither does a malignant tumor or an automobile gone out of control. That is why good people get sick and get hurt as much as anyone. No matter what stories we are taught about Daniel or Jonah in Sunday School, God does not reach down to interrupt the workings of laws of nature to protect the righteous from harm. Insurance companies refer to earthquakes, hurricanes, and other natural disasters as "acts of God." I consider that a case of using God's name in vain. I don't believe that an earthquake that kills thousands of innocent victims without reason is an act of God. It is an act of nature. Nature is morally blind, without values. It churns along, following its own laws, not caring who or what gets in the way. But God is not morally blind. I could not worship Him if I thought He was. God stands for justice, for fairness, for compassion. For me, the earthquake is not an "act of God"...If a bridge collapses, if a dam breaks, if a wing falls off an airplane and people die, I can not see that as God's doing. I can not believe that God wanted all those people to die at that moment, or that He wanted some of them to die and had no choice but to condemn the others along with them. I believe that these calamities are all acts of nature, and that there is no moral reason for those particular victims to be singled out for punishment...I don't know why one person gets sick, and another does not, but I can only assume that some natural laws which we don't understand are at work. I can not believe that God "sends" illness to a specific person for a specific reason. I don't believe in a God who has a weekly quota of malignant tumors to distribute, and consults his computer to find out who deserves one most or who could handle it best (Kushner, *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*, 58-60).

This is basically an attempt to relieve God of responsibility and make Him out to be someone worthy of worship. In my estimation he has greatly diminished his God to be someone far below what the Bible presents Him to be.

His God does not intervene in this world to protect people like the Bible says He does, so he has just written off much of the Bible. He does not understand why one person gets sick and another does not, but he is able to assume the fact that there is some natural principle at work that we don't understand. To me it is just as easy to say that God is at work and we don't understand why.

If we can't accept the fact that God is behind the forces of nature, at least we should be able to accept the fact that God can interrupt the forces of nature. This at least is the clear teaching of the Bible. But once you admit this, it brings problems. If God can interrupt nature, then why doesn't He do it more often? Why does He allow nature to do so much damage? To relieve God of any responsibility of the damage done by the forces of nature you have to make nature completely independent of the Lord and keep from God interrupting the laws of nature as Kushner does.

To get away from God being responsible for nature, you have to limit the powers of God and disregard the clear teachings of the Bible. If God can not interrupt the forces of nature, then there is really no legitimate reason to pray. Harold Kushner deals with this in his book and basically says that prayer is for our own good, not to get God to work.

## **GOD RULES AND REIGNS UPON EARTH**

There are many passages that speak of God ruling and reigning over all the earth, of Him being King and of His kingdom (Ps. 59:13, 66:7, 103:19). Some of these are references to Him being king of Israel.

George Bush does not rule and reign in Russia. Not even in a democracy can we say that one person rules or reigns, but in Cuba, Castor rules and reigns. The idea behind a king is a person who has all the authority to do as he pleases in a given part of the world. We are talking about a person with control and power and forces to control what happens in a given area of the world.

When we say that God is King and reigns upon the earth, then we are basically saying that God is in control of what happens. There are several places in the Bible where it is said that all things happen because of the Lord. Romans 11:36 says, "For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen".

In the Psalms when it talks about God ruling and reigning, it means that God is in control. If God does not rule, then everything is chaotic and Satan and mankind is out of control and God can do nothing about it.

## **GOD CHANGED THE NATURE OF ANIMALS**

We have already looked at the fact that after the flood there was a change in the diet of man and animals. Before the flood they ate fruits, grains and vegetables. But after the flood man and beast began to eat meat. Tennyson's characterization of the animal kingdom as "red in tooth and claw" became a reality. Did these animals change themselves and evolve? Did the devil make them do it?

God is the creator of the animals kingdom and only God could make those changes in the nature of beasts. God shall once again change the nature of beasts in the kingdom of Christ upon earth and the lamb shall dwell with the lion (Is. 35:9, Is. 65:25).

With the eating of meat came bloodshed and pain. Again Romans 8:22 says, "For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now."

Who changed the nature of the beasts? This can only be the work of Almighty God. I don't think the devil could have done this nor that they evolved. God had to do this.

## **GOD CONTROLS THE LEADERSHIP OF THE NATIONS**

It is a very clear revelation in the book of Daniel that God is in control of who controls the nations, "the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will (Daniel 4:25, 32). Paul says that the power that be are ordained of God (Romans 13:1). In Revelation Christ is presented as the King of kings. He rules over kings and is in charge of who rules and who does not rule.

God even controls the wicked confederation of nations in the tribulation period, God put it into the hearts of the ten kings to confederate with the Antichrist (Rev. 17:17).

Many Christian historians see the hand of God in the foundation of America. We know that God had a part in the founding of the nation of Israel. But we also have to accept that for some reason that God has allowed wicked and evil men to rule and they have done unspeakable harm. Men like Hitler of Germany and Edi Amin of Uganda were evil and wicked men who did a huge amount of hurt in their own nation and some in the whole world and the whole world had to fight them.

I know that this raises a lot of questions. Why would God allow wicked and sinful men to rule? But even in the Bible God allowed wicked men to rule the northern kingdom for a time.

I can't explain these things, but yet we know again that even if God does not cause every man to come to power and that Satan may have a part in this for he is associated with kings (Ezekiel 28) and demons with principalities and powers, that God can remove people.

So even if we don't say that God is immediately involved in bringing every person to power, we have to accept the fact that God could prevent certain people from being made king. If God can prevent people from coming to power and He can remove them. And once we allow this we are faced with the same problem of why God has allowed not caused some people to come to power and why He does not remove the wicked men.

### **GOD TAKES RESPONSIBILITY FOR ALL CALAMITY**

In discussions about the suffering that takes place upon earth, theologians try to defend God. Kushner says that he is not going to defend God and His ways, but he does. He says God is not to blame. He could not worship a God that allows or causes any or most of the suffering on the earth so he nature working on its own without God the culprit.

Faith healers make the devil the culprit.

But Biblically it is not that easy. We see God involved in the affairs of this world. We see God working to prevent the destruction of the Jews under Haman in Persia. We see God saving Daniel in the lion's den and Shadrack, Mesheck and Abednego from the burning fiery furnace.

We see God controlling Satan and only allowing Satan to do certain things in regard to Job. We see God involved and we see Christ doing miracles. We not only see God intervening to prevent things from happening we see God actively involved causing things to happen. The natural conclusion is that God does cause a lot of suffering to come on man or He can prevent it.

This in one sense makes God responsible. He could have prevented the fall of man and all the consequences of that fall. He could have prevented all the calamities of Job. Satan said that God had put a hedge about Job. He could have kept that hedge up and protected

and blessed Job. But God allows Job to be tested. All things are of the Lord in the sense that He selectively allows all things to happen or causes them to happen.

There are several places in the Bible where it is said that all things happen because of the Lord. Romans 11:36 says, "For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen".

God even openly omits all things are from Him. He openly takes responsibility for bad things that happen, not sinful things but plagues and sickness. Amos 3:6 says, "Shall there be evil in a city, and the Lord hath not done it?"

In Isaiah 45:7 the Lord says, "I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil: I the Lord do all these things."

It seems silly for us to try and defend God from the attacks of man and try to make this all reasonable to mankind so that they will believe and follow the Lord, when the Lord plainly takes responsibility for bad things. Some people are not going to accept this no matter how reasonable we make it.

### **GOD CAN CONTROL THROUGH PROVIDENCE**

In the story of Esther we don't see miracles happening. We don't find statements that God did this and God did that to save His people from wicked Haman, but the implication is there.

The whole point of Esther seems to be that God did not allow wicked Haman to destroy His people. God worked behind the scenes to protect them. If I were a Jew I would be wondering why God prevented Haman from destroying countless Jews in Esther's day and not in Hitler's day.

The story of God working through providence is also seen in stories like Joseph going down to Egypt. His brothers meant him harm but God worked it out for good.

God works through miracles to protect, but God also works through providence. I have a tendency to think that God often works in this way millions of time and does not get credit for it, but when He does not, then people get angry for allowing something bad to happen.

I can look back in my life and see many times where I could have died but did not. God has protected me walking through snake infested areas in Ghana, working on a live electrical wire in the parsonage in Osceola, near misses on the roads and stupidity on my part when I was a teenage driver.

I think we need to give God credit for protecting us far more than we give Him credit.

## CONCLUSION

I know that this raises all kinds of questions.

Those that consider God to be an old white haired grandfather who does not seek to do anybody any harm and loving and kind, will have all kinds of questions.

But to deny what we have said would be to go against a large array of evidence from the Word of God.

Many people could not worship a God who allows or causes all of these things to happen. It does not fit with the kind of God that they imagine God to be. But our image of God must be according to the Word of God. It is the Bible that reveals God to us. We must accept it and learn to trust it and not our own feelings and thinking.

But one thing we must remember in this whole conversation about suffering. God did not just watch us as we suffered. God also became a human being and He experienced what we suffered.

You can judge and criticize God for allowing or causing so much pain, but as Dorothy Sayers says, He had the honesty and courage to take His own medicine,

For whatever reason God chose to make man as he is—limited and suffering and subject to sorrows and death—He had the honesty and courage to take His own medicine. Whatever game He is playing with His creation, He has kept His own rules and played fair. He can exact nothing from man that He has not exacted from Himself. He has Himself gone through the whole of human experience, from the trivial irritations of family life and the cramping restrictions of hard work and lack of money to the worst horrors of pain and humiliation, defeat, despair, and death. When He was a man, He played the man. He was born in poverty and died in disgrace and thought it was well worthwhile (Yancey, *Where Is God When It Hurts*, 161-162).

# POSSIBLE REASONS FOR SUFFERING

I don't know if I thoroughly convinced you in that last message that God either allows or causes all things to happen or at least that He can. You might see my point to some extent, but are not ready to accept it completely.

That may still be a stretch of the imagination to you for "all things" includes a lot of horrific things and it is hard to explain all things. To say that Satan and wicked men do all the evil things and God simply allows them, may not satisfy either. It may contradict all that you know and believe about God because you just don't see why God would allow it to happen.

It all comes down to trying to find some reason for suffering. Without finding some reason or purpose behind suffering we will never come to accept it as being from God. If we can find some acceptable reasons for suffering then the fact that God is in control is a lot more reasonable and acceptable to man.

But from my perspective, if the Bible says that God is in control, we need to accept it whether we can figure it out or not. We are not in a position to criticize God if He is in control and we can not figure it out.

For God to cause or permit it there must be some reasons. There must be some purpose behind it. Harold Kushner says that he can't believe in a God that causes pain and suffering.

In this message we want to think of possible reasons why God would either allow or cause people to suffer. Faith healers say that all pain, suffering, sickness and death is of the devil and the result of sin. We tried to show that that was not true.

We tried to show in the last lesson that ultimately that God either causes or allows all things to happen. Then the next logical question is why would God allow so much suffering to happen? What can be the purpose behind it all?

I want to say in the beginning of this lesson that what we share here is not going to satisfy us in regard to every situation we find suffering. I don't have all the answers. All I am trying to prove here is that there are reasons for suffering other than we have sinned and God is punishing us or the devil is treating us badly.

Why do people suffer so much? All that we have said so far in this series of messages has led up to this message. This is where people really struggle. Horrendous things happen to people and we wonder why it happened. It does not make much sense to us. It may contradict everything that we know about the sinfulness of man, especially if you accept the idea that man is basically good and about God, who most accept as loving.

Hopefully everything that we have said so far has prepared us for this lesson. We are not going to tie it all together, because there is too much to tie together, but hopefully we shall see the relationships here. There is more to suffering than sin and the devil can't be behind all of it or he would have to be God. We shall examine this later.

Again I want to say, as I have said so many times and shall emphasize several more times again before we are done with these messages, we need to guard against jumping to conclusions here and making everything fit into one model or pattern.

It is not as easy as the faith healers make it out to be. All suffering does not come from the devil or from God as a punishment for sin. Some suffering as we saw in one lesson comes as the result of making a wrong decision because we did not have enough information or we had to make a quick decision and made the wrong decision.

In this lesson we are talking about some good reasons why God either causes or allows pain and suffering. We could talk about why Satan causes us to suffer. But the main question seems to be why God allows or causes suffering.

### **SUFFERING CAN BE PROFITABLE**

Although I am not going to spend a lot of time here or go into a lot of detail for much of the rest that I am going to say is around this point, but I want to make the point as we start that suffering can be profitable.

All people no matter where they are on this issue seem to recognize this point. Faith healers don't like to speak about it too much but they even recognize that some suffering is good for us. Harold Kushner also admits that he is a better rabbi through the suffering of his son but he does not see it as the reason why his son was sick. The price was too dear for it to be true.

But this is specifically taught in Hebrews 12. We are told in Hebrews 12:10 that God chastens us for our profit.

Psalms 119:67 says, "Before I was afflicted I went astray: but now have I kept thy word." Psalm 119:71 says, "It is good for me that I have been afflicted: that I might learn thy statutes." Both of these verses indicate that affliction helped him to do what is right and that it was good for him.

The general statement must be made as we begin that all suffering is not bad and it can be profitable for us, we may not always see the good, but God is in charge and there is a reason for it.

Romans 8:28 "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are called according to his purpose." I know that there is an attempt to make the "all things" refer to verses 29-30 which speak to the purposes of God in election and predestination. But that would mean that God is only interested in our salvation. But the rest of the chapter expands upon the all things and says that we are more than conquerors even through the trials of life through Him and nothing can separate us from the love of God.

I think we must admit here that not all things work together for good to the unsaved and those that rebel against God. Christ said it would have been better for some men if they had never been born.

Some horrific things are going to happen to unsaved, it is in a sense not for their good. We must recognize that some things happen not for the good of mankind but for the punishment of mankind.

### **SUFFERING CAUSES US TO DO GOOD**

When we see people suffer when they do something wrong or we suffer because we do something wrong, it teaches us not to do that. The book of Proverbs talks about wisdom “crying” in the streets or from the housetops several times (Prov. 1:20-23, 8:1-8). When we hear about a man losing all of his money at a casino and he commits suicide or embezzles from his employer or goes bankrupt, it seems to be crying out to us, “Don’t do this!”

When we read of a man getting drunk and then dying in an automobile accident or killing someone with his car, wisdom seems to cry out, “Don’t do this!” Without the suffering that goes along with sin and the blessings that go along with doing what is right, we would probably do a lot more things that are wrong,

In the book of Proverbs we are told, “Withhold not correction from the child: for if thou beatest him with the rod, he shall not die. Thou shalt beat him with the rod, and shalt deliver his soul from hell” (Prov. 23:13-14). Every parent knows that as parents we need to discipline our children. Today the rod is not popular but we know that correction is good. Discipline and even pain that we administer to our children helps that child to do what is right. Without it, they would not grow up to be good people.

The suffering that is associated with wrong or evil prompts us to do what is right and we need all the motivation we can get to get us to do what is right.

### **SUFFERING AND PAIN ARE A VITAL PART OF LIFE**

The pain that is transmitted by nerves is a vital part of life. The same nerve cells that bring us pleasures and sensations that we love to have, also bring us pain and this pain is very helpful at time and is lifesaving. Pain is really necessary in life.

The pain that we experience from our nerve endings are really very helpful and lifesaving. They warn us of danger and help us to avoid getting hurt. If we did not feel pain then we could run a nail through our foot and not know about it or care much.

If we did not feel pain we could pick up a hot stick from a fire and not know it. If we did not feel pain we could freeze or burn to death without really knowing it was coming like the proverbial frog in the pan of water.

Why do we feel pain? Approximately one out of every 400,000 babies born are fated to live a short, pitiful life which none of us would envy, a life in which he will frequently hurt himself, sometimes seriously, and not know it. That child has a rare genetic disease known as familial dysautonomia. He cannot feel pain. Such a child will cut himself, burn himself, fall down and break a bone, and never know that something is wrong. He will not complain of sore throats and stomach aches, and his parents will not know when he is sick until it is too late. Would any of us want to live like that, without feeling pain?...We may mistakenly think of pain as one of God's ways of punishing us..But pain does not represent God's punishing us. It represents nature's way of warning good and bad people alike that something is wrong (Kushner, *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*, 61-63).

### **SUFFERING BUILDS CHARACTER**

As we go through life and suffer the ups and downs of life, it builds character in us (Romans 5:3, James 1:2-4). It makes us stronger just as strong and rigorous exercise builds and develops muscles. Some people intentionally push themselves to their limits to build character and courage. The armed services do this to train men for war.

The trials and difficulties in life make us stronger as we draw nigh to God and learn to depend upon Him (2 Corinthians 12:9-10). As we go through the tough times, it builds courage and strength and prepares us for the next time. Just like an experienced soldier may not have quite the jitters that someone who has never been in combat. We learn a lot from suffering as well.

As we suffer we tend to be more sympathetic towards others who are suffering. Solomon says, "It is better to go the house of mourning than to the house of feasting for that is the end of all men, and the living will lay it to heart. Sorrow is better than laughter: for by the sadness of the countenance the heart is made better: (Ecclesiastes 7:2-3).

We don't learn a lot from a picnic or birthday party or some joyous celebration. Every time someone goes to a funeral they are made to think for a few minutes about what awaits us when we die, whether there is a God and how we can be right with Him. Funerals teach us that life is short and we should prepare to meet God.

Children who are pampered most of their lives do not grow up to be productive and well adjusted adults. So God does not pamper us.

### **SUFFERING CAN HELP US APPRECIATE LIFE MORE**

If everything went smoothly for everybody in life and there were no real challenges, then most of us would be bored and miserable and we would not appreciate what we had. Without some trials, difficulties or challenges in life, life would not be as interesting.

How much would we appreciate life if we all had a million dollars, we did not have to work, we went fishing and we would catch our limit of really big fish, were perfectly healthy, ate the best of foods, could do anything we wanted and never had any problems to work out. Everybody lived to be 100 and we all died in our sleep. Do you really think

you would enjoy that kind of life being with we are right now? I believe heaven will be like that but we will be different in heaven.

I think people like a challenge. I enjoy bow hunting for deer because it is such a challenge. Without a few bad times we would not appreciate the good time. Hunger is a form of suffering and it makes us appreciate food. Tiredness is a form of suffering and it makes us appreciate a good bed and sleep. Working real hard makes us appreciate a vacation or a day off. If every day was a vacation we would get tired of it soon.

I remember reading a tract that has stuck with me through the years. The man was out on the golf course and suffered a heart attach. He actually died and they revived him again. He went to the hospital and had by-pass surgery. When he got out of the hospital he said his wife looked prettier, the grass looked greener, life was precious and he cherished each day and did not take life for granted any more. Sometimes suffering does that to us.

### **SUFFERING CAN HELP US TO GET PRIORITIES STRAIGHT**

At times in our lives we get preoccupied with things that don't really matter. We get busy making money and collecting all the trinkets of this world and we have pity parties for ourselves because we don't have more things. Then some tragedy hits and all the things that we have been seeking after seem meaningless.

I remember reading one time that those young people who have had after death experiences were usually more well adjusted and a lot more mature than those without them. It helped them to get some priorities right.

Richard Wurmbrand in his book *In God's Underground* speaks of being in solitary confinement for so long that he longed just to hear a human voice. But then when he was allowed to be where he could hear others talking he found it very irritating for they talked of such trivial things. "One could hear men talking when they were out for exercise. In the past I had sometimes longed for the sound of a human voice, but now it was an irritation. Men spoke nothings. Their thoughts seemed trivial and false" (Wurmbrand, *In God's Underground*, 70-71).

Just recently I have struggled with why our support was not coming in as missionaries. A lot of things were not working out the way they should. I was feeling frustrated and discouraged and a bit angry. Why could not people see the need of training pastors in Ukraine? Then our pastor of about 45 years got sick. His body was filled with strep infection. His kidneys stopped working, he had trouble breathing and he has some heart problems. He was on kidney dialysis, breathing machine and eventually they had to put a trachea in for him to breathe. He is the father of five children and his oldest is a freshman in college. After going to see him and seeing him having troubles even in breathing I felt fortunate to be alive and well.

I have often had to go through this in order to get my priorities straightened out. I believe that the Lord straightened out a lot of people in our church through the sufferings of our pastor.

## **SUFFERING TESTS AND REVEALS OUR CHARACTER**

Job's sufferings were a test of his character and by his sufferings his real character is seen. What kind of a person do you think you are? What kind people are others around me? How do we know what kind of person we really are?

Character can be tested in many ways: by prosperity and also by poverty and suffering. In Proverbs 30:7-9 we read, "Two things have I required of thee: deny me then not before I die. Remove far from me vanity and lies: give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with food convenient for me: Lest I be full, and deny thee, and say, Who is the Lord? Or lest I be poor, and steal, and take the name of the my God in vain." It appears from that verse that we can be tested by poverty and suffering or by prosperity. Both have their areas of temptation.

What kind of person does the devil and God think you are? How much do you really love the Lord?

God often allows His children to be tested severely to show their character and faithfulness to Him or their hypocrisy and their need of growing. The Bible frequently talks about God trying our hearts (Jer. 17:10, Ps. 7:9, Ps. 11:5, Pro. 17:3, 1 Thes. 2:4). God allows us to be tried to show our real character to Him, to others, to the devil and to us.

It also reveals our true character to us so that we can improve. Many fail these trials and we may be tempted to think it would have been better not to be tried and fail, but when we are tried and fail at least we know what we are really like.

When persecution came to the churches of Russia after the Boleshevik Revolution, all churches were purified. Many stopped attending and those involved in the Russian Orthodox and the Protestant churches acknowledge that it did the churches good.

Richard Wurmbrand says in one of his books that we was happy to discovered he was a real believer through his suffering in prison. Before the persecution he did not know exactly if he was a believer or not but all the things that he went through and his faithfulness to the Lord showed to him he was really a believer. He says,

People expect pastors to be models of wisdom, purity, love, truthfulness: they cannot always be genuinely so, because they are also men; so, in smaller or greater measure, they begin to act the part. As time passes, they can hardly tell how much of their behavior is play-acting....Did I believe in God? Now the test had come. I was alone. There was no salary to earn, no golden opinions to consider. God offered me only sufferings—would I continue to love Him?...Slowly...I began to realize my real personality, and made sure that it belonged to Christ. I found that even here my thoughts and feelings turned to God and that I could pass night after night in prayer, spiritual exercise and praise. I knew now that I was not play-acting, believing that I believed (Wurmbrand, *In God's Underground*, 47-49)

God was proud of Job's character and faithfulness to Him and He wanted to show the devil that Job really loved Him. Trials and tribulation are often talked about in the Bible as a trail of our faith (I Peter 1:6-7, James 1:3). God allows us to be tried so that our true character will be known (Hebrews 11:35-38, James 1:12, Revelation 2:10).

One of these days the Lord is going to give out some rewards and crowns to His faithful servants at a tremendous awards ceremony in heaven. Those crowns and awards are going to be given out according to our works for the Lord and to give them out God must know our true character and one of the best ways God can do that is to let us go through some trials, afflictions and suffering.

### **SUFFERING CAN BRING GLORY TO GOD**

When we suffer for the Lord successfully and go through trials and difficulties with great patience, hope and trust in God, it brings glory and honor to the Lord (Acts 16:23-24).

As we stand before the Lord in heaven one day and all that we have done for Him is brought out, it too will bring honor and glory to Him. Every unselfish act of love that we have done through the power of God in our lives is going to bring glory to Him.

So when you are being tried remember that how you do in that trial is an opportunity to bring honor and glory to the Lord.

John Piper in his book *Let the Nations Be Glad* tells of an Africa who heard the gospel and got saved. He returned to his village to tell them of Christ. They did not like it and so the men held the man down and the women beat him with barbed wire until he passed out. They drew him out of the city to die. When he woke up he could not understand why they had done that and thought that he must have done something wrong, so he went back again to tell them of Christ. The men once again held him down and the women started to beat him with barbed wire until he passed out and they dragged him out of the village and left him to die. When he awoke this time, he was determined not to give up and went back to the village. Immediately they grabbed him and started to beat him again with barbed wire. The last thing he could remember before he passed out again was that the women started to cry. When he woke up this time the women were nursing him back to health in his own bed. That whole village came to know Christ because of what that man was willing to suffer (Piper, *Let the Nations Be Glad*, 93-94).

The above story can be repeated hundreds and thousands of time. God's people both in the OT and the NT show God's people willing to suffer tremendous suffering all because they love the Lord. The history of the church and of missions reveals that people have risked and given their lives for the sake of Christ, they have buried their wives and children for the Lord. They have contacted diseases and made every conceivable sacrifice to get the gospel to the ends of the world. These sacrifices show their love and they bring honor and glory to the Lord.

Even to bear patiently with suffering and trials in life are a tremendous testimony for the Lord.

## **SUFFERING REVEALS WHAT GOD IS LIKE**

Some people struggle with suffering and the very existence of God. They question the existence of God or the fact that God is love because people suffer so much. This is because they think that God is some nice white haired old grandpa and they can't understand why He would allow so much suffering.

There are only a few explanations for this. The first explanation would be that there is no God and therefore we suffer so much. Some have come to this conclusion.

The second is that God is not able to do anything about suffering. This view limits God's power and makes Him powerless in some areas.

The third view is God is some big tyrant and does not care for us.

A fourth view is that God is somewhere off in heaven and He is just observing and does not intervene in life.

The fifth view, God is not this old softie people think He is and suffering does have a positive affect upon mankind, sometimes for those going through it and sometimes for those that observe the sufferings of others.

The above theories can all be proved wrong except the last one. God is not this sentimental old wishy-washy Person that does not want mankind to experience any kind of pain.

It would seem that God has planned for mankind to suffer. It is almost impossible to explain suffering if all suffering is bad, if mankind is basically good and God is powerful and able to do anything and does not want mankind to suffer.

Some people see all evil as coming from the devil and all good as coming from God, but God takes credit for everything that happens on earth, both good and evil (Amos 3:6, Isaiah 45:7, Jeremiah 44:27).

The suffering that we see in the world is a warning that God is not a sentimental old grandpa who would not hurt a flea.

## **SUFFERING IS A WARNING OF JUDGMENT AHEAD**

Natural disasters seem to be a warning of judgment to come. In heaven everything is going to be perfect: no sorrow, no crying, no death, no pain, because God is pleased with those in heaven and wants to bless them (Revelation 21:3-4). If God were pleased with all people on earth, we should expect the same kind of blessings on earth as there are in heaven. Right?

If everything on earth was perfect we would naturally think that things are right between us and God. People all over the world think like this. They believe that when bad things

are happening that they have offended God or the gods and they do things to try to be right with God.

It is almost a universal and natural tendency of mankind to think that when bad things happen that God is angry with them and judging them. We see people believing this in the Bible (Jonah, Paul being bitten by the snake, the man born blind).

Even the scribes and the Pharisees believed that one's relationship to God could be seen by his blessings in this life.

In one sense we can't judge our relationship to God by our own suffering and we have already talked about that. But mankind in general are rebels against God and exceedingly sinful and shall experience the wrath of God in the next life (Romans 2:5-9, Luke 16:19-31).

All the earthquakes, droughts, floods, tornadoes, volcanic eruptions and even the extremes of cold and heat should be a warning in a general way that God is not pleased with us and the relationship between man and God is not good.

As we read the papers week after week it should tell us that mankind in general is not right with God. Something is wrong in this relationship between mankind and God. Actually the suffering of mankind in general should be a warning to all men everywhere to repent of their sins and get right with God.

We see God doing this in the tribulation period. God brings horrendous judgments to show mankind their sinfulness and need for change (Revelation 16:8-11).

## **SUFFERING CAN SHOW GOD WISDOM AND POWER**

When we are sick and have troubles and turn to God, it is an opportunity for God to show His wisdom and power. When everything is going okay, we seem to forget about God and don't pray and seek His face, but when things start to go wrong, we cry out to God for help and God often does some tremendous things when we pray.

When our pastor was so terribly sick he had hundreds of people praying for him and I was in his room when one of his nurses told him that he had a lot of doctors scratching their heads about how he recovered. The nurse said that he was a text book case for doctors to study. God had showed His wisdom and power.

When Joshua prayed the Lord caused the sun to stand still for about a day. When the children of Israel prayed for deliverance from the bondage of Egypt, God sent Moses to deliver them from Egypt with all the signs and wonders.

When the church prayed for Peter the Lord did a miracle and brought Peter out of prison. James tells us that the prayer of faith shall save the sick. Christ said about Lazarus dying, "This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God might be glorified thereby" (John 11:4).

When Christ was asked why a man was born blind, He said, “That the words of God should be manifest” (John 0:3). Christ was glorified many times after He healed people upon earth.

When Jeremiah was shut up in prison the Lord said, “Call upon me, and I will answer thee and shew thee great and mighty things, which thou knowest not” (Jeremiah 33:3). It seems there that God wanted Jeremiah to pray in his trials and difficulties so that God could show His great power.

We need to be careful here, because we are told that we are to walk by faith and not by sight and an evil and adulterous generation seeketh after signs.

But when people get in a desperate situation, it is an opportunity for God to show His power and wisdom. Answered prayer is a tremendous testimony to the fact that God is real and powerful.

### **SUFFERING ALLOWS GOD TO SHOW HIS LOVE AND GRACE**

When our world falls apart and we turn to God and He comes through for us, it shows us that He is real and truly cares for us. This in a sense has to be an individual thing, so God can personalize the attention, so we get the idea that He cares for us not just everybody in general but for me particularly.

So each of us seems to have to go through our own set of difficulties so God can show each of us that He cares.

### **SUFFERING CAUSES PEOPLE TO SEEK GOD**

Without suffering most people would forget about God and live as they please. We tend to seek God when we get in a tough spot. Those that are rich and prospering in the world have a tendency to forget God (1 Timothy 6:17, Exodus 5:2, Job 21:70-15, Judges, Proverbs 30:9).

Suffering brought the prodigal son home, it brought the Philippian jailer to the Lord and wicked King Mannaseh back to the Lord (2 Chronicles 33:11-13).

When the church was persecuted they prayed and sought the Lord (Acts 4:21-30, Acts 12). Suffering will cause most of us to get closer to the Lord.

A famous preacher once said that suffering and adversity is like the shepherd’s dog that barks and scares the sheep back into the fold and closer to the shepherd.

Margaret Laid in her book *They Call Me Mama* tells of a village where she went to speak and how she was not received well at all. In that village was a beautiful young woman who was the wife of the chief. She had it made and did not want to listen to Margaret as she talked about God. But years later Margaret went to leper colony and spoke to the lepers who were there. After she was done speaking a deformed woman hobbled up to

her. She could not walk and crawled along on the dusty soil. She looked up at Margaret and ask her if she remembered her. Margaret said no. The woman then revealed how she was that beautiful young wife of the chief in such and such a village. She had got leprosy and was made to leave and come to this leper colony. At first she was very angry, but eventually she came to know Christ as her Savior. She told Margaret that she praised God that she got leprosy or she would never would have responded to the gospel.

Richard Wurmbrand in his book *In God's Underground* talks about while he was in prison because of the communists that he became so sick that he was sent to Room Four or "the death room" and no one ever left it alive. Here people that were so sick they were not expected to live were kept. Here is what Wurmbrand said about that room:

Scores of men died, and their places were taken by others in the thirty months I lay in this room. But here is a remarkable fact. Not one died an atheist. Fascists, Communists, saints, murderers, thieves, priests, rich landowners and the poorest peasants were shut together in one small cell. Yet none of them died without making his peace with God and man. Many entered Room Four as firmly convinced unbelievers. I saw their unbelief collapse, always, in the face of death. I have heard it said: "If a cat crosses a bridge, it doesn't mean the bridge is sound; but if a train crosses, then it surely is." So if a man calls himself an atheist as he sits with his wife over tea and cakes, that is no proof of atheism. A true conviction must survive enormous pressure, and atheism does not (Wurmbrand, *In God's Underground*, 76-77).

Not only does suffering sometimes soften the hearts of people so that they will listen to the gospel, but suffering on behalf of the sufferer can prepare the hearts of people to listen to the one suffering.

I may suffer greatly and the way I go through my suffering, people realize that I have something that they need. The suffering of the preacher or witness often prepares the heart of people to listen.

### **SUFFERING PREPARES US TO LEAVE THIS WORLD**

As people get older and begin to suffer more and more physical problems, it prepares them and their family for the time when they shall die and leave this world. If we all died in our prime it would seem like a great injustice to leave.

But when we get old and the "evil days" of old age come and that time comes that we shall have no pleasure in them, it all prepares us to leave this world (Ecclesiastes 12:1).

So some of the suffering of growing old is a mercy of God preparing us or our loved ones to leave and for us to leave.

Many people come to a point where they want the Lord to take them home or they want the Lord to take their loved one home to heaven because they are suffering so much and it lessens the affect of the death of that person.

## **SUFFERING BRINGS PEOPLE TOGETHER**

When someone is suffering and going through a rough time, we often forget our petty differences with them and help them out.

We all tend to identify and feel sorry for the person suffering and it can bring people closer together.

Suffering can and often does break up homes and marriages, but it can also bring married couples closer together and families depending on the circumstances and how they react to it.

## **SATANIC SUFFERING CAN BE USED BY GOD FOR GOOD**

It is very clear from the Bible that the devil had a part in putting the Lord Jesus to death (Luke 22:3) and that wicked men also had a part in His death (Acts 2:23), yet God used the death of His Son to provide salvation for the sins of the world.

Satan had a part in Job trials but Job's story has been a tremendous encouragement to millions of people.

Paul's messenger of Satan was used of God to keep Paul humble (2 Cor. 12:7).

Even suffering that Satan causes can be used of God to discipline His own children (1 Tim. 1:20).

## **CONCLUSION**

This chapter does not cover all the possible reasons why God would allow suffering to come upon mankind.

But the point of this chapter is to get us to see that good can come from suffering. There are reasons why God allows or causes suffering and there can be many reasons why suffering comes to us.

There is infinite wisdom behind it and so we shall not always know why something happens because we are not God with infinite wisdom. We shall never understand the senseless killing that takes place upon earth and why God allows it to happen.

The point of this lesson is that one pattern or reason does not fit all kinds of suffering. All suffering is not bad and of the devil. Even if the devil is behind some calamity, God can use it for good as in the death of Christ.

There can be reasons and God has revealed some reasons in the Bible.

Even people like Harold Kushner and faith healers acknowledge that some good can come from bad things. But they can't see good reasons for all things and the ones that they can't explain seem to dominate in their minds and upset everything for them.

I like the summary by Philip Yancey of what God said to Job. God reproaches Job for some of the things he said and God basically takes Job to His creation to show Job his wisdom and power. Yancey's evaluation of what God says to Job is this, "Let him who is about to accuse God consider the greatness of the God accused" (Yancey, *Where Is God When It Hurts*, 84).

This is a very important issue and we all need to be careful what we attribute to God and the part that we give to God.

I don't believe we have to hide nor can we hide from the truth that God either allows or causes all things to happen. This is a biblical truth and we can all see from time to time why God would allow something terrible to happen. We should not let the difficulty of determining in every situation why God would allow it to happen to change this truth. To understand why God allows all things is beyond us now.

What we do need to guard against is accusing God and being critical of God. Many godly people have done this and it is natural to do it, but we need to trust Him in our times of need and not be critical of Him and His ways.

# **THE DEVIL'S PART IN SICKNESS & SUFFERING**

We have tried in this series not to be too confrontational or argumentative in regard to what others might believe about suffering. At times we have spent a lot of time on it when we thought it was relevant to the subject being covered.

But in this lesson we want to look at a very popular teaching contemporary evangelical circles and that is faith healers.

Faith healers have been around for many years in America, but with the spread of Pentecostal theology around the world, the number of faith healers and/or the thinking that all sickness is of the devil and God wants all of his children to be healthy and wealthy is spreading.

In this lesson we want to look at one of the major tenets of the faith healing movement that all sin, all sickness, all poverty and all suffering comes from the devil. We want to see what they say on the issue and then think this through and see how it compares to the Bible.

We need to realize that within the faith healing movement that there are wide range of beliefs. Oral Roberts recognizes that God does often use medical science to heal people whereas Hobart Freeman thought it was sinful even to step into a doctor's office.

We might say also that most people who truly believe the Bible believe in divine healing. There are some people who call themselves Christians who don't really believe the Bible and any miracle in the Bible. They don't believe in the resurrection or the death of Christ for our sins. Why they call themselves Christian, I don't know, but there are some of this nature. But most people who believe in Christ as Savior and believe the Bible believe in divine healing.

Even those of us who believe that healing was a sign gift for the early church to confirm the gospel message, still believe as do faith healers that James 5:13-16 is the normative post-apostolic means of divine healing.

We both believe in a personal and holy God with all power. We believe in the inspired Word of God. Some Pentecostal people like the Four-Square group also believe in dispensational theology as some Baptists do.

The main points at which we differ are in the area of all suffering and pain is of the devil and thus bad and it is always God's will to heal and make His children prosper for God wants His children to prosper and be in good health.

## **THEIR BIBLICAL BASIS FOR THIS POSITION**

“Beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth” (3 John 2)

“The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly” (John 10:10).

Satan tempted Adam and Eve and got us into this mess.

Satan destroyed Job’s health, robbed him of his wealth and killed his children.

The cases of demon possessed people hurting themselves, having sickness and crying and weeping.

Certain demons are called “spirit of infirmity” (Luke 13:11), “deaf and dumb spirit” (Mark 9:25),

“How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power: who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil: for God was with him” (Acts 10:38).

There are many other passages that I don’t have time or space to copy here. There is much in the Bible that says that Satan tempted people and that Satan caused some suffering and pain.

### **STATEMENTS FAITH HEALERS ON THIS ISSUE**

“This general principle, that sickness is the result of sin and may be traced to the influence and power of Satan, is specifically illustrated in the following:

1. The affliction that came upon Job.
2. Those whom Jesus healed were oppressed of the devil (Acts 10:38).
3. The woman who had been bowed over for 18 years (Lk 13:16).
4. The prophetic outline of Jesus’ ministry (Lk 4:18). Mankind was bound and the prisonkeeper was Satan.
5. Enmity between Satan and the seed of the woman (Gen. 3:15). Satan has harassed the human race ever since.
6. The man in Corinth turned over to Satan for the destruction of the flesh (1 Cor. 5:5).
7. Sickness is among the curses of the broken law (Deut. 28).
8. Paul’s thorn in the flesh (2 Cor. 12:7).
9. Satan bound during the millennium. There will be no sickness on earth during he millennium (Is. 33:24, Is. 11:9, Mal. 4:2). It is highly significant that Satan will be bound in the bottomless pit all during this time (Rev. 20:2,3).
10. Jesus rebuked sickness. In healing the sick, Jesus sometimes dealt with them as He did with demons, showing that He considered sickness the work of the devil (Lk. 4:35, 4:39).  
(Duffield, *Foundations of Pentecostal Theology*, 367-368)

“Then Satan, and not God, is the real author of sin, sickness and death” (McCrossan, *Bodily Healing and the Atonement*, 7).

“Yes, every sickness, disease, and deformity, which Christ cured while on earth, were all the results of sin, Satan’s work” (McCrossan, 8).

“Just imagine what it would be like to never have to be healed again. Of course, it’s nice to get healed when you have been sick or physically injured. But imagine what it would be like to live healthy and whole all the time. No colds, no flu, no allergies. No heart disease, no mental illness...no cancer. Well according to the Word of God, that’s exactly the way our lives should be. In fact heaven is a pattern of that kind of good life God has for us” (Gloria Copeland, *Get on the Highway to Good Health*, sermon on website).

### **ANALYSIS ON THIS ISSUE**

**There Is Some Truth To What They Say.** We have to admit from the start that the devil did tempt Adam and Eve to sin and as a result of that sin a horrendous amount of suffering did ensue. So, in a sense, the devil is directly responsible for what has happened upon earth. We must admit that Satan causes a lot of hurt and pain among the multitudes of people who live upon earth. We don’t question this. What we can’t agree with is that all sickness, pain and suffering are of the devil. There is a world of difference between some sickness being caused by the devil and all sickness, all suffering being caused by the devil. We have already showed the sources or causes of suffering.

**God Ultimately Allows or Causes All Things to Happen.** There would be no sin or suffering if God did not created angels and man with the ability to chose between good and evil. God could have prevented the sin and rebellion of the devil and his angels from spreading to the earth by not allowing the devil access to Adam and Eve, so ultimately God has allowed this to happen.

Satan is the direct cause and the responsibility belongs mainly to Him, but we must recognize that God allowed it to happen. God either allows or causes all things to happen.

**God Chastens His Children So They Will Partake of His Holiness and Righteousness.** This is a very clear and obvious teaching in Hebrews 12:5-11. Even some, if not most, Pentecostal preachers will admit this, but there seems to be an attempt to minimize this. Duffield says, “God sometimes allows sickness to come upon His children as a chastening measure because of their disobedience or sin (Heb. 12:5-13). This, again, points out the relationship between sickness and sin” (Duffield, *Foundations of Pentecostal Theology*, 369).

This commentary on Hebrews 12:5-13 misses the mark completely. That passage says that whom the Lord loves He chastens. If the Lord loves us He will chasten us, God loves all of His children so God is going to chasten all of us. If the very fact that God chastens us is proof of His love then I would have to say that frequency of that chastening would also show His love. If God does not correct us frequently then He does not love us very much either. A parent that does not watch carefully his or her children and correct them frequently and neglects to discipline them when they are wrong, is not a good parent. Proverbs 29:15 says, “The rod and reproof give wisdom: but a child left to himself bringeth his mother shame.” Children need supervision and discipline, so do we. God is not a negligent parent. He is actively involved in chastening.

Not only does it say that God chastens us but he “scourgeth every son whom he receives.” All of God’s children will be the recipients of God’s chastening and we all receive a scourging which is a very severe chastening.

This truth is not stressed because it makes the fight against sickness and suffering harder to fight. They believe that you must believe to be healed and if you begin to question if God is willing to heal, you will not be healed. If God is chastening us with some sickness then it opens up the door for doubt. Basically faith healers seem to want to make all sickness and suffering bad and of the devil so they can boldly fight against it.

**We Also Sin Because of a Sinful Nature.** It is obvious that the devil causes a lot of suffering as seen in the case of Job and that Jesus healed people who were oppressed by the devil. But the Bible is very clear that mankind sins because of a sinful nature.

James tells us, “But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death” (Jam. 1:14-15).

Christ said, “That which cometh out of the man, that defileth the man. For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornication, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness: all these evil things come from within, and defile the man” (Mk. 7:20-23).

Paul outlines the works of the flesh in Galatians 5:19-21 and he lists almost every conceivable sin.

And the point should be made here that even the fact that we have a sinful nature or principle inside of us that prompts us to do evil, this is ultimately of God. God could have created us so that the sinful nature is not passed on through natural procreation. I believe that it was possible for God to do this. God could have made it possible that Adam and Eve only pass on the body and that God sends the spirit or soul into the body so that there is a holy nature at the center of the body.

Some would probably argue that sin caught God off guard and that is why sin is passed on by natural procreation. But I don’t believe that is the case. God knew that man would sin if given a choice and He knew that sin would be passed on and that it would infect the whole human race.

It was ordained before the foundation of the earth that Christ would die and we were chosen in Him at that time, so God knew that sin would enter the world and the whole human race would be affected and a sacrifice and way of salvation had to be provided. I don’t think God would have allowed man to get into this mess unless He had a way out of it. So even the fact that sin is passed on by procreation was established by God.

**Not All Suffering and Sickness Is Of The Devil.** All sickness and suffering and sin can not be the direct work of the devil. The devil is a created being who can only be in one place at one time and he can not be the father or source of every murder or of every lie. Every problem that we face can not be a direct work of the devil. This again would make the devil omnipresent, omniscient and omnipotent like God.

John 8:44 says that the these people to whom Jesus was speaking were “of your father the devil” and that he “was a murderer...and a liar and the father of it.” This passage is specifically directed to the scribes and Pharisees who were opposing the Lord. During the time of Christ there was an abundance of activity by the devil and his demons. Cain was of the wicked one but that does not mean that every sin or sinner is a direct product of the devil (1 John 3:12).

Let us just say for a moment that the devil is behind every murder. That might be a conclusion that we could come to from John 8:44 and 1 John 3:12. He works in every murder’s heart to cause or tempt them to kill. In America alone there are estimates that around 1,500,000 abortions happen every year. If you add the murders and attempted murders that take place in America and around the world, there is probably close to 5,000,000 abortions, murders or attempted murders annually (this is a very conservative figure, it could be closer to 10,000,000).

But if we take the 1,500,000 abortions in America alone and we consider that most of these are squeezed into abortion clinics that operate Monday through Saturday from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. which is only around 54 hours a week. That means that every minute there are close to 30 abortions taking place in America at the same time. Now let us add lies for the devil is the father of the lie (John 8:44). We have to recognize that the amount of lying that takes place is far greater than the amount of murders. The devil can not be the source of every lie for He would have to be everywhere present and all knowing to do that. He would have to know what the truth is in every situation and prompt the person to not tell the truth.

Now let us add every rape, every case of flu, every case of having a cold, every cancer that is started, every headache that occurs, every sickness, every divorce, every car accident, every robbery, every case of fornication, every case of adultery, every case of pride, every hurricane, every earthquake, every suicide, every financial problem, every tornado and every cut, scrap of the knee and every time someone hits their finger with a hammer and you have the devil doing something hundreds of thousands of things every second of every day of every year. The Devil can not do this, he is not God.

Only God is capable of being every place at one and doing all these things if He wanted to. Of course God is not causing all these things to happen. He may cause some and He may allow others. But one thing we know the devil can not be behind all of these things.

For him to work in order to tempt and defeat God in our lives the devil would have to know what is going on in each of our lives and in every situation. He would have to know how to work and what to do in every situation to defeat us. He would have to know every individual perfectly to know our areas of weakness, so he could tempt us in the area of our weakness.

We are really glorifying Satan when we give to him attributes that only God can have. I am sure that the devil is pleased when he is given attributes that only God has. I don’t think the devil is ashamed that divine healers are always talking about him and giving to him powers and abilities that only God has. To make the devil and demons responsible for all sin and suffering, the devil would have to be God or almost every person would have to be demon possessed. This is not biblical.

Demons are very numerous but the picture we get of demons from the gospels is that they indwell people, there can be legions of angels in one person. But they are not free to go around tempting people to sin. They are possessing people and using people to do evil. They do not seem to be free going from person to person, they indwell people. To say that the devil through his demons causes all the evil in the world, you would have to say that a demon indwells every person or every person is personally accompanied by a demon or demons. This is not the biblical picture. The biblical picture is that demon possession is rare.

***If Every Temptation and All Suffering Is Of The Devil, It Makes Victory Easier.***

I think one of the reasons why faith healers attribute every sin and sickness or problem to the devil is that it makes victory easier. If the temptation and suffering is of the devil and it is all outside then the possibility of victory becomes greater. James 4:7 tells us, "Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you."

That scenario seems easy compares to the struggle that the man in Romans 7 has with sin that is dwelling in him. If the struggle with sin comes from within and it is a part of our members then we shall never be free of it in this life and the perfect little life with no sin and sorrow and the life of victory is shot to pieces. We might have victory at times but complete and absolute victory that faith healers like to preach is harder to preach.

***To Attribute All Evil to the Devil Makes Fighting Suffering Simple.*** I think that another reason why all sin and trials must come from the devil in the Pentecostal theology is that if some trials come from God it becomes harder to fight against them.

You would have to be able to recognize which ones are from God and which ones are of the devil. If God is chastening one of His children, you don't want the elders of the church coming and praying for healing if God is behind it and some healers would probably rebuke the devil in this situation and that is not good if God is the one causing the sickness.

It makes it easy and simple to fight against sickness and hardship if they all come from the devil. Basically the solution to any kind of sickness or trouble is to pray, confess your sins and get right with God. This seems simple but that would not have worked with Job. He was a righteous man, yet he suffered.

***The Statement that Heaven Is a Pattern for Life Now Is False.*** Gloria's statement that life in heaven is a model of how life should be upon earth is a terrible evaluation of the Biblical revelation about heaven and life on earth. It is false. According to Revelation 21: 4 there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying, nor tears nor pain." The plain truth of the matter is that no one lives like that upon earth not even the greatest and godliest of men or the greatest faith healer. It is promoting a lifestyle that no one enjoys. Some faith healers claim to be living it and it is easy to claim it for some at a given period of time when for the moment you are healthy and wealthy. But some of the most godly of people are very poor. James tells us that God has chosen the poor to be rich in faith.

Bruce Barron makes the following comments on Hobart Freeman, a faith healer.

Ironically, Freeman maintained his views on healing and doctors while failing to enjoy the fruits of his own teaching. In his case the disease was visible to all who saw him: polio, suffered when he was a child, forced him to wear a special riser for his withered right leg. According to Faith Assembly's explanation, the healing of his leg "has been claimed by faith, but the manifestation has not occurred yet." An alternate explanation also given was that the limp was an example of "Job's trials' designed to enrich [Freeman's] ministry."...Freeman's newborn grandson died of respiratory failure in February 1980, causing further strain within Faith Assembly and further bizarre reactions from its leaders. Indiana officials claim that a respirator would have saved the baby's life. Freeman, meanwhile, blamed the death on his son-in-law, Bruce Kinsey, for lacking faith (Barron, *The Health and Wealth Gospel*, 22).

The Lord did not teach us that life on earth would be easy and that we would be healthy and wealthy and free from all suffering. He told us that in this world ye shall have tribulation. He told His disciples that they would be hated for His name's sake. Paul said that all that live godly will suffer persecution.

None of the apostles enjoyed this heaven-on-earth life talked about by the healers. Christ did not enjoy this good life. He wept on several occasions, He became hungry and tired and He died a horrendous death. David was a godly man as the Psalms bring out but he endured a tremendous amount of trials and difficulties.

**Can the Devil Be Defeated with an Aspirin, a Kiss or a Bandage?** To say that the devil is responsible for every cold, every scraped knee, every toothache, every vision problem, every headache, every trivial accident, every bruise or cut and every time I hit my finger with my hammer makes the devil out to be stupid. The devil is not stupid. Ezekiel 28:12 says that he was full of wisdom.

Are we to think that me hitting my finger with a hammer is really important to the devil? How about all the other trivial things that cause us pain and sorrow upon earth? How ridiculous is it to say that the devil causes every headache when all we have to do is to take an aspirin to cure it? The devil would be wasting his time. Is the devil defeated by an aspirin?

A child falls and scrapes his knee and comes crying to his mommy and his mommy hugs and kisses him and puts a bandage on it and boy runs off to play. If the devil is really the cause of all of these trivial little things, then he is not too smart and wasting a lot of time, for most of us brush them off and go on with our lives. They are like water that rolls off a duck's back.

John MacArthur in his book about *Charismatic Chaos* talks about someone claiming that they were in their living room and began to choke. The man said that the devil was choking him until his wife came in and it quit. His explanation was that his wife had chased the devil away. That story is ridiculous. The devil is not afraid of a woman. The devil stood in the very presence of Almighty God and was not afraid of rebelling against Him.

No woman is going to scare the devil away and what is that man saying about his wife? Is he saying that she is so mean that the devil is afraid of her?

**The Devil Can Make Sinners Prosperous.** The idea that all poverty and sickness is of the devil is flawed by the fact that the devil has it in his power to make wealthy. The devil offered to the Lord Jesus all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them if the Lord Jesus would worship the devil (Matt. 4:8).

The Bible is very clear that there are many temptations that go along with being rich, so it makes sense that the devil would make as many as possible of his followers rich. When things are going well we tend to forget God, troubles drive us to the Lord. Make people rich and healthy and they will forget God.

In order to attract other people into godless lifestyle of the rich and famous, it would seem that the devil would make some people very rich and then publicize it. This is exactly what happens all the time.

**Death Is A Blessing.** When Adam and Eve sinned God kicked them out of the garden and would not permit them to eat of the tree of life lest they live forever in their present sinful state (Gen. 3:22-23). God knew all the suffering and heartache that sin would cause the human race and the Lord did not want them to live forever in that sinful state so he kicked them out of the garden and did not let them to eat of that tree and live forever in a sinful state.

Through salvation and the death, burial and resurrection God is able to make some changes in the believer so that he would not sin in heaven. This is a blessing. Paul talked about going to be with the Lord which was far better (Phil 1:23) and Paul said that to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord is far better than living in this world (2 Cor. 5:8).

In the end death will be swallowed up in victory through the Lord Jesus for the believer (1 Cor. 15:54-57).

## **CONCLUSION**

We have to concede that in one respect all sin and suffering is of the devil, since the devil tempted Adam and Eve to sin. He is thus the distant cause of all suffering, but he is not the immediate cause for it all.

The devil can not be the immediate and direct cause for all sin and suffering because the devil is not God. He is powerful and wise but He is a created being who can only be in one place at one time. Very very limited in what he can do.

## **SUFFERING AND GOD'S WILLINGNESS TO HEAL**

Another major foundational truth related to faith healers is their insistence that God is always ready to heal. It is always God's will to heal not only in the days of Christ and the apostles, but before NT times and after NT times.

It is just the logical conclusion one would have to come to if all sickness and suffering is of the devil, then God must be opposed to the works of the devil and therefore God is always willing to heal.

### **THE BIBLICAL BASIS FOR THEIR TEACHING**

Exodus 15:26 "If thou wilt diligently hearken to the voice of the Lord, thy God, and wilt do that which is right in His sight, and wilt give ear to His commandments, and keep all His statutes, I will put none of these diseases upon thee, which I have brought upon the Egyptians: for I am the Lord which healeth thee."

Exodus 23:25 "And ye shall serve the LORD your God, and he shall bless thy bread, and thy water: and I will take sickness away from the midst of thee."

Psalms 103:3 "Who forgiveth all thine iniquities, who healeth all thy diseases"

Matthew 9:35 "And Jesus went about all the cities and villages teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people"

Mark 6:12 "And they went out and preached that men should repent. And they cast out many devils, and anointed with oil many that were sick, and healed them"

Isaiah 53:4 "Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows"

Acts 10:38 "God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power: who went about doing good, and healing all who were oppressed of the devil; for God was with him."

Hebrews 2:14 "Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, He also Himself likewise took part of the same; that through death He might destroy him that had the power of death, that is the devil"

1 John 3:8 "For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil"

Mark 16:17 "And these signs shall follow them that believe; in my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; they shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay their hands on the sick, and they shall recover."

James 5:14-15 “Is any sick among you? let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord; and the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up.”

Matthew 21:22 “And all things whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive”

John 14:13 “And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do; that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If ye shall ask anything in my name, I will do it”

1 John 5:14-15 “And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us: and if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him”

### **STATEMENT BY FAITH HEALERS**

“God does not want us lacking in any area of our lives” (Kenneth Copeland, Prayer Your Foundation for Success, 3).

After quoting Isaiah 53:5 and Matthew 8:17 which faith healers believe refer to Christ dying for our sicknesses and sins, Kenneth Copeland says, “ Undoubtedly healing is God’s will...More religious traditions have discounted God’s will for healing than those that discredit salvation. To know God’s will toward healing, look to Jesus. Jesus said, He that hath seen me hath seen the Father (John 14:9). During His time on earth, Jesus was the express image of God (Heb. 1:3). What did he do? He healed the sick. Acts 10:38 says, God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power: who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with him” (Copeland, 11-12).

“A very misunderstood concept throughout the religious world is that it is extremely difficult to get God to answer prayer at all—much less answer all prayer. That is a lie of Satan and absolutely contrary to the Word of God. When you believe God’s Word in your heart and you pray in line with His Word, you have every right to expect your prayer to bring results” (Copeland, 16).

Dr. T. J. McCrossan in his book *Bodily Healing and the Atonement* gives six reasons why all Christians should take Christ as the healer of their bodies.

1. Because God used to heal the sick, and He is an unchangeable God.
2. Again all Christians should expect God to heal their bodies today, because Christ died to atone for our sicknesses as well as for our sins.
3. Again all saints should expect God to heal their sicknesses today, because all sickness is the result of Satan’s work, when he introduced sin into this world, and Christ was manifested to destroy Satan’s work.
4. A fourth reason, why all Christians should expect God to heal their sick bodies today, is because the very same Holy Spirit who did all of Christ’s miracles, and raised Him from the dead, is still in the church, and has all His old time, life-giving power.

5. Again all Christians should believe in “Divine Healing” today, (a) because of Christ’s last great commission, (he referenced this statement with Mk. 16:17-18) and (b) because of God’s direct command in James 5:14.
6. And now we come to the sixth and final reason why all true Christians today should expect God to heal their bodies, viz. because of His marvelous promises, the fulfillment of which depends altogether upon the exercise of our own faith (he referenced this statement with Matt. 21:22, “And all things whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive.” Mark 11:24, John 14:13, John 15:7, 1 John 3:22).

“God is Good, and wills the blessing and the health of all His children...If sickness is of the Devil, certainly God does not will it upon any of His blood-bought children” (Duffield, *Foundations of Pentecostal Theology*, 374).

“Just imagine what it would be like to never have to be healed again. Of course, it’s nice to get healed when you have been sick or physically injured. But imagine what it would be like to live healthy and whole all the time. No colds, no flu, no allergies. No heart disease, no mental illness...no cancer. Well according to the Word of God, that’s exactly the way our lives should be. In fact heaven is a pattern of that kind of good life God has for us” (Gloria Copeland, *Get on the Highway to Good Health*, sermon on website).

### **MY ANALYSIS OF THEIR POSITION**

**We Should Be Willing to Say, “Thy Will Be Done in Any Situation.”** Some, if not most, of the faith healers take the position that when we are praying for a person to be healed we should not say, “If thou wilt, please heal this person.” They say that the moment you say that you begin to bring doubt into the whole equation for healing and if we bring the slightest amount of doubt we won’t get the healing for he who wavers in faith shall not receive anything of the Lord (Jam. 1:6-7).

But my point is that no matter what the situation, a Christian should always be willing to say, “Thy will be done.” We know from the Bible that God loves us and that He is infinitely wise. We should never fear God’s will. It may not be what we think it ought to be, but we should trust Him to do what is best in every situation, so we should be able to boldly say, “Thy will be done.” The following is a sad commentary on how faith healers view God’s people trusting and wanting God’s will to be done in the most desperate of situations. This is a quote from Kenneth MacKenzie, a faith healer:

The will of God has been a deep shadow on their pathway, obscuring the light of present blessing with its possible decrees of sorrow. It has been a skeleton in their closet, which they have prayed to stay behind closed doors. It has been a presence from whose cold embrace they have pleaded to be released. Their dread of His will has impelled them to school themselves to be ready for its visitation as for the pestilence that seeps through the land. The will of God is associated with sick rooms, poverty, loss, bereavement, funerals, the open grave. The will of God, to such, is always dressed in black. And this conception of His will give us sickly Christians, weak faith, empty joy, puny conquests (Duffield, *Foundations of Pentecostal Theology*, 372).

**Although God Has Always Been Involved in Healing, There Are Times When It Was More Abundant.** The fact that God heals today should not be denied. God does heal. God can use divine healers to get God's people to look to God for healing and to be healed. The fact that thousands of people have been healed and there are glowing testimonies to this fact is no indication that it is always God's will to heal.

There is healing going on today not only in faith healing meetings but also in the lives of Baptists and many other denominations. Almost every religious groups tries to prove their faith is the real one by some kind of miracle or miracles.

In the Bible we find three periods of great miracles and healings: the time of the Exodus when God was proving Himself to Israel, the time of Elijah and Elisha when Israel was backslidden and God was seeking to get Israel to come back to Himself and the time of Christ and the apostles when God was demonstrating the truth of the message and messenger with signs.

But we find it said of John the Baptist that he did no miracle (John 10:41). God does miracles to foster faith at times and it is clear that He did so in the early church (Mk 16:20, Heb. 2:4). But specifically we are told that Jews require a sign. The early church was appealing to the Jews. But it is a cheap and weak faith that depends on miracles, when people are attracted to the gospel through signs and wonders it takes more and more miracles and signs to keep that faith alive and well.

Missionaries in a conference I was in in Chicago recently told of missionaries trying to reach an unevangelized tribe in the jungles of South America. As they were going down the river, this tribe waited on both sides of the river to shoot at them with their arrows. When they shot a wind came along and none of their arrows hit a missionary. It was not too long after that they looked up those missionaries because they were impressed at the miracle. A church was started and it was soon filled, but some 20 years later the church was empty. Those people were attracted by the miracle but they needed continual miracles to keep their faith alive. When God did not answer their prayers as they thought He should they gave up on him.

**This Promotes Health and Wealth Too Much.** To speak of God's willingness to heal and to prosper us in every way, actually promotes the status of being healthy and wealthy too much.

The Bible seems to indicate that we should not set our affects on the things of this world (Col. 3:1-2). We are told that the love of money is the root of all manner of evil (1 Tim. 6:10). It says that if we love the world and the things of the world, then the love of the father is not in us (1 John 2;15-16). Solomon in the book of Ecclesiastes says that whatever his eyes desired he got and did not keep back himself from any joy, but when he looked upon it all and thought upon it all, "behold, all was vanity and vexation of spirit, and there was no profit under the sun" (Eccles. 2:11).

We are told having food and raiment let us be therewith content (1 Tim. 6:8). Hebrews 13:5 says, "Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee."

It seems to me that this idea that God wants us to be prosperous in the world promotes health and wealth. Much of the preaching of the faith healers deal with this area. It is their constant theme and what keeps them in business. Multitudes struggling with devastating sickness and the poor come to these people for healing. It is almost the central truth in their ministry. It is really what makes them distinction and healers are getting rich through selling books and offerings and admission charges at healing campaigns.

But in this discussion we need to realize that the devil can make a person rich too. When the devil offered the Lord Jesus all the kingdoms of the world and the wealth of them, the Lord did not call him a liar. It is in the power of the devil to make rich as well as poor. When people are rich they have a tendency to be proud and to forget God (Prov. 30:8-9). There are many warnings and exhortations about the temptations of being rich.

***This Teaches That Nothing Good Can Come From Sickness and Suffering.*** We have already shown that much good can come from sickness and even death. It is a logical correlation of the faith healers view of suffering and pain that there is nothing good about it. It is all of the devil and is all therefore bad and it must always be God's will to eliminate it. God wants His children to be healthy and prosperous, because of the pain of sickness and poverty. We have already talked about some of the reasons why God would allow suffering and pain.

This whole health and wealth gospel sounds too much like something that would come from a group of believers raised in a very affluent society and is very materialistic and has not seen very much pain and suffering. It also shows a very inadequate understanding of suffering. There is a blessing in suffering that most people know nothing of except those who have actually suffered for their faith.

Richard Wurmbrand, who spent many years in prison, was tortured and who suffered from tuberculosis in his book *In God's Underground* says,

The prison years did not seem too long for me, for I discovered, alone in my cell, that beyond belief and love there is a delight in God; a deep and extraordinary ecstasy of happiness that is like nothing in this world. And when I came out of jail I was like someone who comes down from a mountain top where he has seen for miles around the peace and the beauty of the countryside, and now returns to the plain (Wurmbrand, *In God's Underground*, 1).

After an extensive tour of the United States, the well known German pastor and theologian Helmut Thielicke was asked what he saw as the greatest defect among American Christians. He replied, "They have an inadequate view of suffering" (Yancey, *Where Is God When It Hurts*, 15).

***If God Is So Willing To Heal and All Sickness and Pain Are Bad, Why Did God Make It So Hard to Be Healed and To Retain That Healing.*** The idea that we must have a perfect faith to be healed is not what we see in the gospels. Basically what you have in the gospels is that if people had enough faith to come to Jesus to be healed they were healed. Theirs was not a perfect faith. Christ when He healed certain people chose one out of many to be healed and they were not even looking to Him to be healed. Some

of them were not even believers. In John 9 the blind man did not even know who Jesus Christ was. In Acts 3 when Peter and John went up into the temple they healed a beggar who was only looking to them for alms. He was not expecting to be healed.

Faith healers in their comments often compare healing to being forgiven. Just as God wants all to be saved, God wants all to be healed. But biblically God has made it easy to be saved. Salvation is a gift that we receive by faith. It is given graciously and freely. God has done all the difficult things for us like dying on the cross so that salvation can be obtained easily.

So if God is so willing to heal people and healing is a priority on His list of things to do for people, why make it so hard for people to be healed? I believe that faith healers make it so hard for people to be healed in order to explain why so many are not healed. They don't want to blame God for God is always willing to heal, but in a sense when God makes it so difficult to be healed, God is to blame. If God really wanted to heal all who are sick, He should heal people with a simple faith and make it easier to be healed.

Gloria Copeland said, "Remember this: it's not up to God whether you get faith or not, it is up to you" (Gloria Copeland, *How to Receive Your Healing*). In most faith healers books they go into elaborate details of how to get faith and how to maintain it and it is a long and complicated process for if you don't maintain your faith you may lose it.

**There Are Vast Differences Between the Healing in the NT and Now.** We read on several occasions that Jesus healed all that came unto him and all that were oppressed of the devil. Jesus raised people from the dead on several occasions.

Faith healers have elaborate excuses why people are not healed and why they don't raise people from the dead. It would seem to me that if sin, sickness and death is of the devil that faith healers ought to be able to defeat the devil by raising people from the dead as well. If sickness and death are of the devil, why would they not be able to raise the dead. They don't want to go this far. They see a difference and like to maintain the difference. As far as I see it, they are not doing very well with normal healing, let alone raising the dead.

People in the Bible who had been crippled from birth were made to leap and run immediately (Acts 3). We all know that if a man has been lame from his mother's womb that there is atrophy present. There would be very little muscle tissue to cause a person to walk let alone leap. His legs would basically be bones. Yet in Acts 3 this man walked and leaped in the temple.

Christ healed people perfectly, completely and immediately, this is far different than a lot of what goes on with faith healers. Gloria Copeland tells of a man who sought to be healed 17 times. Can you imagine a man coming to the Lord Jesus to be healed 17 times and not being healed? I can't.

**God Can Be Glorified Through His Suffering Saints.** It is true in a sense that God is glorified when miraculous things happen. Christ was glorified when Lazarus was raised from the dead and well again. But God is also glorified through the suffering of Job. When Job said, "Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return

thither: the Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away: blessed be the name of the Lord” (Job 1:21) he is glorifying God and being a tremendous testimony for the Lord.

Job is not perfect through this whole ordeal, but Job is held up in the rest of the Bible as being patient. God is glorified when a saint is martyred for the faith and he remains faithful to the Lord and God expects this (Rev. 2:10).

Some of the dearest saints that I know have been those that have suffered the most. They have been refined and grown through the whole process. There are some things we only learn through suffering. A smile on the face of a suffering saint is a tremendous testimony. Faith healers would have us remove that smile with a frown for that person has sinned and done something wrong and God is not pleased with him.

If God wants all of us to be rich and healthy and He made it easy to be rich and healthy and basically every believer was, then many would become believers to be rich and healthy. They would have an ulterior motive. The church would soon turn into a country club, with pool, tennis courts and golf course.

Satan accused Job of serving God because of the blessings and this is what this test is all about. Does Job really love God or does he just love the blessings of God upon his life? Does a girl love the rich boy or his money? Both Satan and God are agreed that this kind of devotion was not good and so Satan is allowed to test Job and to see if Job would curse God if the blessings were removed. It is a cheap devotion that only serves God for blessings. It is unacceptable by God.

John Wenham declares, “The highest goodness asks for no reward save that of knowing that it is doing God’s will. It is really self-evident that if acts are to be truly virtuous, rewards and pains must not be obviously proportioned to deserts. To do right solely because it is right would scarcely be possible if the act were at once rewarded and the choice never costly” (Yancey, *Where Is God When It Hurts*, 69)

If this happens then the accusation of Satan against Job would be true and Job’s love of God would be perverted (Job 1:9-11).

**Just Because Christ Healed a Person of Some Serious Disease Does not Mean That They Did Not Have Other Problems.** The gospels have many accounts of Christ healing people and the faith healers take this as a sign that God does not want any of us to suffer in any way.

But just because Christ healed a person of some life threatening disease once does not mean that they did not have other serious problems. At any given period of our lives most of us are dealing with several problems at once.

Those blind men and lepers that Jesus healed were social outcasts, but they also were very poor and despised by people as being sinful and cursed by God. Any beggar in Jesus’ day was a poor man as well as a sick man. Just because they were healed does not mean that Jesus made them wealthy too.

Just because Jesus healed a man of blindness or made him walk should not be taken as a sign that all of that man's problems were gone and he would live healthy and prosperous for the rest of his life.

The faith healers are reading far too much into Jesus healing people. He did not solve all their problems and they were all now healthy, wealthy and respected. They still had a lot of other problems to deal with.

**Christ Healed Not Just Because of Their Faith and His Compassion On Them.** Faith healers want us to believe that Christ healed people when they had the right kind of faith. A perfect faith with no doubt, but Christ healed people who were not expecting to be healed. He healed people who were dead.

Christ healed also to demonstrate that He was God and had the power on earth to forgive sins. He healed to prove who He was and so people would believe. John makes it very clear that his gospel was written and the "signs" were recorded so that we might believe that Jesus is the Christ and that we might have life through his name.

This is the ultimate reason why the miracles of healing were done. The salvation of a soul from hell is far more important than getting a person out of some earthly or temporary problem, even though that problem was horrific as in the case of leprosy.

**There Is a Blessing in Suffering.** Surely we have to admit that it would be a tremendous blessing to see the Lord heal and to recover people from being very sick. But there is also a blessing in suffering. The NT has many verses such as the beatitudes that talk about the blessing of the poor and the persecuted.

But in many cases it is a period of suffering that has a tendency to make normal life a blessing. We often have pity parties for ourselves for our lot in life and we complain about what we don't have and can't do because we don't have the money or the time. But then we get really sick and when we come out of that sickness we appreciate things better. So there is a blessing in being sick and getting better but the blessing follows the sickness so the sickness is in a sense good.

**The Idea That God Always Wants To Heal Does Not Make Sense When You Consider All the Material in The Very Last Lesson on How to Handle Suffering.** In the last lesson we are going to look at some of the advice that the Lord gives us on handling sickness and suffering.

There is all kinds of material in the NT on how to handle suffering. We are told to expect it and rejoice when it comes.

All of this material in the last lesson does not make sense if what God really wants is for us to be healed. If God really wants us all to be healed and to prosper, then you would expect to find a lot more instructions on how to be healed and how to be prosperous and how to escape it, but that is not the case, most of the instructions is on how to live with it.

## CONCLUSION

Divine healing is a very shallow interpretation of the Word of God. Their interpretation and views on healing do not come close to explaining all the situations in which people suffer.

It is a well documented fact that those in the faith healing movement have caused the death of countless hundreds of people. Faith healers get people who would normally live long healthy lives if they would seek proper medical attention to often die needlessly. They get people to trust God preaching that it is always God's will to heal and all they have to do is confess and get right with God and He will heal them and they die.

Then they have to come up with some excuse of why so many people are dying and they have to blame it on those that died. They did not have enough faith. God was willing but they did not meet the requirement.

Let me say this, without getting into a long detailed explanation of healing in the atonement, that when Jesus died on that cross he was dying for our sins and making it possible for us to escape the judgment of God upon our sins. Our sins offended a holy and a righteous God and Jesus was making it possible for God to remit the penalty of our sins. When we are saved and forgiven, our sins are removed from us as far as the east is from the west. That is salvation. Christ died to provide that salvation for us.

It was a satisfaction or a propitiation directed towards God because of something that we did. Sickness is not something that we did to anger God. It is not part of our rebellion, it is part of the curse of God upon the sin of man. Sickness is right in there with the curse of the ground and the pain of childbearing and the broken relationship between a man and a woman. Sickness is just a small part of a complete package of things that came upon man because of Adam's sin.

Eventually it all shall be removed for the child of God through the Lord Jesus, but that curse is removed finally and completely in heaven, just as the curse of the ground is removed and the curse of pain in childbearing. Revelation 22:3 says that there and then there shall be no more curse.

Sickness is not something that Jesus had to die and suffer for, any more than he had to suffer and die for the curse of the ground and the pain of childbirth. Remove the sin and the curse is gone, all the curses. It is the sin that had to be atone for, not all the sicknesses, all the thorns and thistles, all the pain of childbirth, not all the accidents, etc.

When you say that Jesus died for sicknesses you are promoting sickness too much. You are making sickness the cause of God's anger towards us. If you say that Jesus died for sickness, you are going to have to load Him also with every tear, pain, sorrow, accident, tooth ache, headache, scraped knee.

When we do this we promote sickness and actually we trivialize the sin that Jesus actually died for. It makes sickness equal to sin. **THIS IS NOT TRUE.** If this was true we would have a lot more material in the Bible regarding it instead of a few verses.

## **EFFECTIVELY HANDLING SUFFERING**

The faith healers say that we ought to pray, confess our sins and get right with God and have faith that God will heal whatever sickness and solve every trial that we are in. They say that God has commanded us to do this in James 5:13-16. The answer is simple to them: pray and trust God for healing. This is a very simplistic view of suffering and of solving the problem.

This is one way of handling it. We should not discount it. Most of the time when people are sick, people do pray and we believe that God has a part in their healing. Some very sick people have been healed in this way.

But this simple solution does not make sense in the light of all the other instructions in the Bible about suffering and life. There is a great deal of information and insight into suffering in the Word of God that helps us handle suffering a bit different than the simple solution offered by the faith healers.

If the faith healing solution was the answer to every situation of suffering and sickness, you would expect a lot more information in the Word of God on it. It would eliminate the need to have all the rest of this material in the Bible. Book after book ought to have sections saying confess your sins, pray and trust God to end your suffering and it will end.

Most of the time in the NT the possibility of it ending in this life is not even presented. If we don't accept the simplistic instructions of the faith healers, what should we do? How should we handle suffering and troubles?

### **RECOGNIZE THAT GOD IS IN CONTROL**

When Adam and Eve sinned God said that the woman would have sorrow in having children and that Adam would have to make a living by the sweat of his face (Genesis 3:16-19). God also kicked them out of the garden so that they could not live forever and that they would die.

Throughout the Bible we find God either causing people to suffer (flood, destruction of Canaanites, tribulation) or allowing Satan to cause suffering (Job, Acts 10:38). God has also established a sowing and reaping principle as observed in the book of Proverbs so that we will feel the consequences of our actions.

God is in control and there is infinite wisdom behind God allowing mankind to suffer. We are not in any position to question why God would allow so much suffering and to think that we know better than God or that the suffering is not right.

We must accept the fact that there is infinite wisdom behind our suffering and we won't understand it. The book of Job was written to get us to trust God in times of suffering when we don't know what God is doing in our lives.

That was the point of God's meeting with Job. God's message to Job was basically, "I am the Creator, look at my handiwork. Can you do this? Look at my wisdom and power. You should be trusting me instead of questioning me and my ways with you."

### **ACCEPT SUFFERING AS A NATURAL PART OF LIFE**

Christ told His disciples, "In this world ye shall have tribulation" (John 16:33), so we ought to expect trials and difficulties because the Lord has told us we are going to have them.

All of us need to prepare ourselves to suffer in life. It is a natural part of life. We shall make decisions that are not good and suffer as a result. It has nothing to do with sin but we just made an error in judgment. To avoid that we would have to be all knowing or God in other words. There is nothing you can do at times to protect your self from the sinful actions of other people, we all have to be prepared to suffer because of other people's sins.

You will have things stolen from you and have a lot of people hurt you because they are sinful. That is life, we live in a world with sinful people.

When you get married, your mate because they are sinful will hurt you by things they say and do and you will hurt them. People in church will say and do things that hurt you. They may misjudge when you say or do something. That is life, learn to live with it and expect it. Peter said in 1 Peter 4:12, "Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you".

### **PRAY AND TRUST GOD TO HELP US**

I Peter 4:19 says, "Wherefore let them that suffer according to the will of God commit the keeping of their souls to Him in well doing, as unto a faithful Creator." When we are suffering we need to commit ourselves to the Lord for His safekeeping and depend upon Him to deliver us or give us grace to go through it.

I Peter tells us to cast all our care upon Him" for he careth for you (I Peter 5:7). When David and his men lost everything they had to the Amalekites and his own men were thinking about stoning him we find that David encouraged himself in the Lord (I Samuel 30:1-6).

Christ said, "Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28-30). Paul said that we are not to be careful ( anxious, worried) about anything but let our requests be made known unto God and the peace of God that passeth all understanding shall keep our hearts and minds through Christ (Phiilippians 4:6-7).

When trails and difficulties come, we need to be much in prayer, committing the situation into the Lord's hands, not telling Him what He ought to do or complaining about it, but asking for God's will to be done and for grace and strength to go through it.

## **TRUST BIBLICAL TRUTH TO GET YOU THROUGH**

Peter tells us in regard to getting victory over the onslaught of the devil that we are to resist the devil “in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world” (I Peter 5:9). It is our faith, what we believe about God and His goodness and power and wisdom, that is going to get us through the trials.

We need to claim the promises of God that all things work together for good to them that love God (Romans 8:28) and that God loves us. We need to recognize that God is in control of things and that He knows what is best and we need to let the Lord work things out in His time and His way.

We need to learn to accept whatever God’s will is for the situation. Paul prayed that the Lord would remove his thorn in the flesh but God said that He would give him grace to put up with it and Paul accepted that and got on with his life and gloried in trials because when they happened the grace of God was abundantly shed upon him and it made him very strong (2 Corinthians 12:7-10).

## **SATURATE YOUR MINDS WITH THE WORD OF GOD**

The Bible is filled with stories, verses and truths that can help us through our difficult times. In Romans 15:4 Paul talks about the patience and comfort of the scriptures. There is tremendous power in the Word of God to comfort and strengthen us. It would be good to claim a verse and memorize it and say it to yourself over and over again.

The armor that God has given us to stand against the wiles of the devil and to wrestle with him is composed mainly of some aspect of the trust or the Word of God (Ephesians 6:10-18). Christ defeated the devil by quoting the Bible (Matthew 4:1-11). Peter tells us to resist the devil in the faith which are things that they believe (I Peter 5:9).

Spending time in the Word will remind you of things that will help you deal with the problems and get the victory.

## **COUNT YOUR BLESSINGS**

In order to not get discouraged over a few bad things that are happening in your life you need to count your blessings. When we have a splinter in our finger, getting that splinter out occupies our attention until it is out.

When we have a problem, that problem seems to take over our minds and hearts and that is all we can think about. In the midst of our trials we need to know that we may have a few problems but we also have been blessed in many ways. Life is a mixed bag of trials and blessings. Praise the Lord for your blessings.

We are told many places in the Bible to rejoice in the Lord and to give thanks for all things (1 Thes. 5:16, 18, Eph. 5:20, Col. 3:15). “By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name.”

It is most important to give thanks when things are not going very well. It is most important to learn to look for the blessings of God upon your life. If you are told you have cancer and you are 40 years old, you need to thank God for the 40 years that He has given you.

If you have several children and then you have one that only lives a few days, you should be thankful for the strong healthy children that you have. God has blessed all of us in many ways, for these blessings we need to give thanks.

We are even told many places in the Bible when we are suffering to rejoice (1 Peter 4:12-13).

### **RECOGNIZE THAT EVERYBODY SUFFERS**

There are several places in the Bible where the saints are envying the wicked (Ps. 73). The wicked seem to be prospering and getting ahead and the complaining saint is not. It is tough for us to suffer when others are not. The natural tendency is to feel sorry for ourselves because we are suffering and others seem to have it made.

The truth is that everybody has their share of trials and problems. In Ghana there is a proverb painted on many of the vehicles that carry people around. It says, "Envy no man". Don't envy any man because every man has their own set of trials and problems. If they don't now they soon will have.

Some people have it made in this life but will suffer greatly in the next life, we should not envy them. In Psalm 73 the Psalmist envied the wicked until he considered his end (vs 17). We should not envy others who have money because money can not make us happy.

### **GUARD OUR RESPONSE CAREFULLY**

A very important part of suffering is our attitudes in the midst of our trials. Try not to question God and have a pity party for yourself.

Try hard not to get bitter and angry with God or life. In the midst of Job's trials, Job began to question and doubt God and God got a little bit upset with Job and had quite the conversation with Job in chapters 38-41.

When the children of Israel had it rough in the wilderness they complained against the Lord and the Lord judged them severely on several occasions.

Elijah had his own little pity party under that juniper tree.

We need to recognize that when the devil is trying us that he is seeking to drive a wedge between us and God. He is seeking to turn us against the Lord and give up our allegiance to the Lord.

God may be trying and testing our faith to see if we really love Him and getting a bad attitude does not show that we are really trust and love the Lord.

## **RECOGNIZE THAT HARD TIME MAKE US STRONGER**

Children that are pampered by their parents and not made to work or do anything that they don't want to do are going to grow up to be very weak anemic adults. Children on the other hand that are made to work at home and made to mind and do things that they really don't want to do, grow from those experiences.

God does not pamper any of His children. He does spare us the knocks of life. The more trials we go through in life the better we are prepared for that lies ahead.

Many people put themselves through the rigors of running and exercise every week or day, knowing that all the exertion does them good. It makes them physically fit. We need to know that the trials and challenges of life make us stronger and healthier people.

So don't try to spare yourself or save yourself from difficulties. Many believers try to pamper themselves from the struggles of life. We avoid things that might take us out of our comfort zone and might cause us to be stretched mentally, emotionally and spiritually. In stead of pampering ourselves we need to take the challenge from time to time to do things that we know are going to stretch us.

## **REALIZE THAT ALL SUFFERING IN THIS LIFE IS TEMPORARY**

Life is short and very soon if we are a child of God we shall be in heaven and everything there is going to be fine. The few years that we have on this earth are our years to suffer.

In the midst of our trials even quoting a verse like, "Life is a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away" can help us deal with our struggles.

If we see our struggles as something that seemingly last forever, they become hard to deal with, but if we treat them as only temporary it helps us cope.

## **KNOW THAT SUFFERING IS A TRIAL OF OUR FAITH**

How we go through trials is really a test of our faith. In Hebrews 11:33-37 we read that through faith people had trials of cruel mockings and scourgings, bonds, imprisonments, were stones, we slain with the sword, were destitute, afflicted and tormented.

In I Peter 1:6-7 we find that the people to whom Peter wrote were in heaviness through manifold temptations and describes it as a trial of their faith.

Our faith says that God is all powerful and He loves me, that God is in control and He will do what is best. It says that God is going to take care of me.

Some of these basic beliefs will be challenged in our trials, don't let suffering destroy your faith, but use your faith to overcome difficulties.

## **KNOW THAT GOD CAN HELP US IN MANY WAYS**

When we turn to the Lord for help we need to realize that He might not help us in the way that we are expecting Him to help us. When we are having troubles we need to commit that problem to the Lord and trust Him with it and not expect Him to do everything our way.

Our God is extremely creative in solving our problems. Sometimes we ask God to help us and at first it appears that God has not helped us at all, but we see later that God helped us in some other way that we were not expecting.

Some things that God does for us are obvious but we may never know how God has helped us. Take for instance we pray for a safe trip and we may not see God protect us from an accident.

Paul had a thorn in the flesh and he asked the Lord to take it away but the Lord gave Him grace to go through it. God can send along a friend to help us. God can remove us from the suffering. God can protect us in the midst of it. God can even take us home to heaven. God helped Israel to win battles against their enemies in many ways. It is really quite an interesting study to see the many different ways that God helped Israel defeat their enemies on the battlefield. He can help us with suffering in many ways.

## **RECOGNIZE THAT WHY WE SUFFER IS A MYSTERY**

Many people when they have something terrible happen to them almost immediately begin to question why this happened to them.

Romans 11:33 tells us that God's ways are past finding out.

Job and his three friends did not understand why he was suffering. The scribes and the Pharisees in Jesus' day did not understand why people suffered, they thought when someone suffered that it was because of sin and when someone was prospering it was a sign of God's blessing. Jesus did much to show them this was not true.

The point here is that in many instances we will never know why we or some other person we know is suffering.

As we pointed out earlier in this paper, there are many reasons for suffering, we need to be careful about jumping to conclusions.

The Lord was very upset with Job's friends for saying that Job sinned and therefore he was suffering. Faith healers need to reconsider their position on the basis of God's anger towards Job's three friends because of their false position that Job was suffering because of his sins. This is exactly the position of faith healers. I believe that just as Job's three friends added to Job's trials by their position on his suffering, so faith healers are adding to the burdens of people by saying they are suffering due to sin. It compounds their troubles.

## **WE NEED TO HAVE COMPASSION ON THE SUFFERING**

Even though we acknowledge that God is in control and He has allowed suffering for a multitude of reasons that we don't understand, yet we should have compassion on those who are suffering.

Some people think that because God has allowed the suffering or even caused the suffering that we should not have compassions and help the person who is suffering.

But while Christ was upon earth He had compassion on people who had needs and healed the sick (Mark 1:40-43). We are told to have compassion and to help those who are suffering (Luke 10:25-37, I John 3:17).

### **CONCLUSION**

If all of this is a bit intimidating, just remember that God is in control of everything. As a believer we can turn to the Lord and He will help you through the most difficult time and that all things work together for good to them that love God (Romans 8:28).

He can deliver or He can help us through them. We should not be afraid of what might happen to us.

God is going to be with us and help us.

Don't be intimidated by the future and what it might hold, trust God to help you through whatever might be coming.

David was a man with a lot of enemies seeking to destroy him yet because of his trust in God and experience with the Lord in tending sheep and fighting lions and bears and his experience on the battlefield, he could say, "surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever" (Psalm 23:6).

This ought to be the kind of attitude that we have in life. God's mercy and goodness is always going to be there for us.