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THE BEREANS

ACTS 17:11

Acts 10:34-35
Lesson #5
The challenge of Suffering
10/23/2022

“There are two serious arguments against the existence of the Christian God -

The challenge of **science**

The challenge of **suffering”**



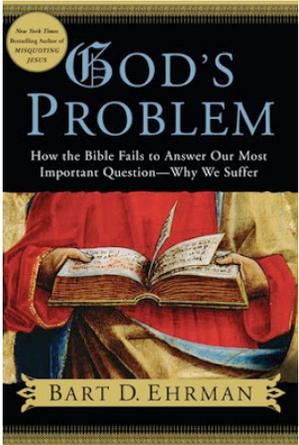
Thomas Aquinas

But for those who have ears to hear they can be God's teaching tools.

1

“Why the Bible Fails to Answer our Most Important Question - Why we Suffer?”

“I just began to lose it. It wasn't for lack of trying. But I just couldn't believe there was a God in charge of this mess.”

Could it be that the Biblical answer is there but we choose to reject it?

2

SUFFERING
can come from different issues

Personal misconduct	Natural wear & tear
Social injustice	Natural disaster

The top two are not the issue.

The bottom two are what most think of as **SUFFERING** that is inconsistent with a powerful, caring God.

3

Suffering and death are **God's visual aids**, that get everyone's attention.

Suffering invites us to renew our perspective of **human nature, God's self revelation, and the Gospel.**

All **religions & philosophies** seek to explain, manage, and eliminate suffering.

BUT DO THEY SEEK TO LEARN FROM IT?

4

Romans 1

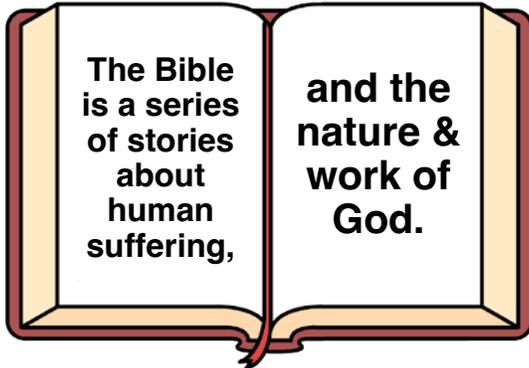
“²¹ For even though they **knew** God, they did not honor Him as God, or give thanks; but they became futile in their **speculations**, and their foolish heart was darkened. ²² **Professing to be wise, they became fools,**”

The human dilemma is not ignorance but rather that **we reject what should be clear through inner and outer SUFFERING.**

5

Lesson #1

Suffering is a WINDOW to the WORD and WAY of the Cross



6

“When suffering comes, we yearn for some sign from God, **forgetting we have been given one.**”

Mignon McLaughlin (journalist)

“The cross is God taking on flesh and blood and saying, “Me too.”

Rob Bell author of “Love Wins”

“Of all the great religious leaders of history, Jesus is unique in that he alone came for the purpose of dying.”

Fulton J. Sheen

“Any discussion of how pain and suffering fit into God’s scheme ultimately leads back to **the cross.**”

Philip Yancey 7-10

Christianity is the only religion that celebrates the suffering of its founder.



and calls its participants to be living sacrifices.

11

NOTE:

- We can medicate physical pain.
- We can legislate social injustice.
- We can manipulate natural forces.
- We can eliminate material obstructions.

After centuries of evolution, education, and technological advances, we still sense that

the fear and experience of suffering persists,

and Scripture tells us IT WILL NOT GO AWAY.

12

“Prophetic future condition” *Matthew 24*

“⁵ For many will come in My name, saying, ‘I am the Christ,’ and **will mislead many.** ⁶ And you will be hearing of **wars and rumors of wars**; see that you are not frightened, for those things must take place, but that is not yet the end. ⁷ For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and in various places there will be **famines and earthquakes.** ⁸ But all these things are merely the beginning of birth pangs. ⁹ Then they will deliver you to tribulation, and will kill you, and **you will be hated by all nations on account of My name.** ¹⁰ And at that time many will **fall away and will deliver up one another and hate one another.** ¹¹ And many false prophets will arise, and will **mislead many.**”

- Suffering is what lies **ahead of us.**
- It will **get worse** until the return of Christ.

13

Genesis 3

“⁵ in the day you eat from it **your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.** . . .

¹⁰ I was **afraid** because I was naked; so I **hid myself.**”

A moral conscience is a witness to the existence of God and His image in us.

Fear and Isolation are a witness to our hopeless despair when separated from God.

14

“My argument against God was that the universe seemed so cruel and unjust. But how had I got this idea of just and unjust?”

C.S. Lewis

“If you think there really is such a thing as horrifying wickedness, then you have a powerful argument for the reality of God.”

The awareness of good and evil is a clue to God’s image in us.

Frustration with the resources of this world leaves us longing for and open to the Gospel.

Alvin Plantinga
Christian philosopher

15-16

We are not alone as we face suffering.

Psalm 23:4

“Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil,
for You are with me;”

He does not say:

“for You will change or remove me from the circumstances”

Peace comes from

“God “with us” as we walk THROUGH circumstances”.

17

“Suffering is unbearable if you aren’t certain that God is for you and with you.”

Tim Keller

“I remembered this basic religious principle that God isn’t there to take away our suffering or our pain but to fill it with his presence.”

Anne Lamott

“In my own life, I think I can honestly say that out of the deepest pain has come the strongest conviction of the presence of God and the love of God.”

Elisabeth Elliot

18-20

Suffering is a needed window in our spiritual formation.

“Tares among the wheat” *Matthew 13*

“24...“The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field 25 But while men were sleeping, **his enemy came and sowed tares also among the wheat**, ...28 And the slaves said to him, ‘Do you want us, then, to go and gather them up?’ 29 But he said, ‘No; lest while you are gathering up the tares, **you may root up the wheat with them.** 30 **Allow both to grow together until the harvest;**”

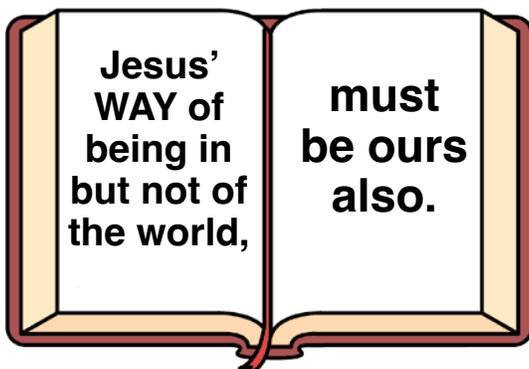
To remove suffering is to stunt our spiritual formation and forget how Jesus learned obedience.

Hebrews 5:8

21

Observation #2

Suffering is a DOORWAY to the WORD and WAY of the Cross



22

“Suffering is actually at the heart of the Christian story.”

Tim Keller

23

1 Peter 3:18

“For **Christ also died for sins** once for all, the just for the unjust, so that he might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit;”

**The WORD of the Cross
(our confession)**

1 Peter 4:1

“Therefore, since Christ has suffered in the flesh, **arm yourselves also with the same purpose,**”

**The WAY of the Cross
(our posture)**

24

“The theology of liberal religion was a God without wrath who brought men without sin into a kingdom without judgment through the ministrations of a Christ without a cross.”

and suffering without learning

H. Richard Niebuhr

“Idolatry is trying to bring in God’s Kingdom before its time and without its King.”

It is the game plan of both the political right and left.

Richard John Neuhaus

25-26

**There will be no suffering in the end.
If we are suffering, it is not the end.**

John 16

“20 Truly, truly, I say to you, that you will **weep and lament**, but the world will rejoice; you will be **sorrowful**, but your sorrow will be turned to joy. 21 Whenever a woman is in travail she has sorrow, because her hour has come; but when she gives birth to the child, she remembers the **anguish** no more, for joy that a child has been born into the world. 22 Therefore you too now have **sorrow**; but **I will see you again, and your heart will rejoice, and no one takes your joy away from you.**” 27

**Expect to gain spiritual strength
through suffering.**

Philippians 3:10

“that I may **know Him**, and the power of His resurrection and **the fellowship of His sufferings**, being conformed to His death;”

Our suffering does not contribute to the atonement for our sin but it does draw us nearer to an intimate relationship with the one who died.

28

**Suffering strengthened Paul’s
“love of” and “faith in” God.**

Romans 8

“18 For I consider that the **sufferings of this present time** are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us. . . . 35 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall **tribulation**, or **distress**, or **persecution**, or **famine**, or **nakedness**, or **peril**, or **sword**? 36 Just as it is written, “*For Thy sake we are being put to death all day long; We were considered as sheep to be slaughtered.*” . . . 38 For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, 39 nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

29

**Suffering is not incompatible
with our faith or God’s faithfulness.**

Hebrews 11

“36 and others experienced **mockings** and **scourgings**, yes, also **chains** and **imprisonment**. 37 They were **stoned**, they were **sawn in two**, they were tempted, they were **put to death** with the sword; they went about in sheepskins, in goatskins, being **destitute**, **afflicted**, **ill-treated** 38 men of whom the world was not worthy, **wandering** in deserts and mountains and caves and holes in the ground. 39 And all these, having gained approval through their faith, **did not receive what was promised,**”

30

Hebrews 12:1

“Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of **witnesses surrounding us**, let us also lay aside every encumbrance, and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with **endurance** the race that is set before us,”

**Suffering is a race to run
not a reason to retreat.**

**Our witnesses are both the saints
behind us and the sinners in front of us.**

**Jesus is our model for this life
and our hope for the next.**

Hebrews 12

“² fixing our **eyes on Jesus**, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. ³ For consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you may not grow weary and lose heart.”

2 Corinthians 1

“³ Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort; ⁴ who **comforts us in all our affliction** so that we **may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction** with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.”

**The WORD of the Cross and the
gift of the SPIRIT comfort us
and challenge us to walk the WAY
of the Cross in the power of the
SPIRIT as we minister to
others who suffer.**

When asked about her ministry as a social worker she replied,

“My ministry is not social work, it is worship. My care for the suffering is my love for Jesus.”



Mother Teresa

How to respond to suffering

1. Expect to suffer in this life (Rom.8:18-25).
2. Fix your eyes on Jesus (Heb.12:1-2).
3. Remember that God is with you (Ps.23:4).
4. Gain insight from suffering (Heb.5:8).
5. Don't ask “Why?” but rather “How” am I to respond now?
6. Live and walk by faith, in the Spirit (Gal.5:25).
7. Live in hope, knowing it all will be worth it (Rom.8:18).