

WHERE IS GOD IN SUFFERING?

***LIFE CLUB
DAILY SCRIPS***

A Family Devotional for Families and Youth

WHERE IS GOD IN SUFFERING?!

As we look at the whole of the Bible, we see a story. But this is no fiction tale. It's a very true story. It's very real and to be taken seriously--and we are living in the midst of the story. It has a beginning and a completion. We are living in the very last chapters before and leading into the final book--the book of Revelations. Some think the days of Revelations have already begun.

The heart of the story is God's creation of US to be a people in wonderful loving relationship with HIM and worship Him forever--the source of all love and goodness, the source of all life, the source of all power. From beginning to end, we see God's heart to bless His people. And His desire and purpose to create one big happy family--to enjoy Him now--and to join Him one day in a wonderful amazing place.

If you've ever been a parent, you know somebody has to be in charge. Somebody has to set the rules. And those rules are for everyone's good and benefit--even if everyone doesn't fully understand or agree with the rules. Or if you drive a car or ride a bus--you are mighty grateful there are rules to the road that everybody has to follow--or else... From the very first man and woman God created (Adam and Eve) we messed up. God created them and placed them in a perfect paradise. But they didn't obey God's loving wise rules. They thought they knew better. And so do we. We rebel and do things our own way. And so the world has become a great big broken mess

There's another character in the story that has a lot to do with the mess. Satan is a fallen angel that royally rebelled against God--despite all the glory and giftedness God had given him. He will be forever damned we are told, but in the meantime he is trying to gain as many followers as possible in his continued rebellion against the Lord. God is the source of all love and all goodness and Satan has cut himself off from God, Hence Satan is void of all goodness and love and filled only with vile hate and evil. He is a great deceiver in trying to trick us as to his real character. He tricked Adam and Even into disobeying God and he is said to be the father of lies.

A great day of judgement--with believers joining one big happy loving family in heaven for all eternity with the perfectly wise and loving King in charge (that's a long time!) with no more pain and tears or sorrow or suffering--and Satan and unbelievers receiving their punishment--is how the story all ends. We are told and guaranteed this is how it all ends.

God doesn't tolerate rebellion and disobedience. Not Satan's or ours. He is not willing for us to selfishly harm one another and His creation and dishonor Him. And according to God's perfectly loving and wise nature, He does not force His ways on us to control us like robots, but gives men free choice to go our own way without Him if we wish. But as a patient loving Heavenly Father He is continually seeking to restore us to the blessedness He intended from the beginning, restored to relationship with Himself and a recipient of all His goodness and care. And so here we are--left with a choice on where we will end up in the story...

WHEN WE ARE GOING THROUGH DIFFICULT TIMES in this broken mess of a world, it can help to identify some of the specific causes of suffering we see in the Bible and what it tells us about where God is in all this mess now.

The fallen broken order of God's creation

We see in the first book of Genesis that the beautiful paradise God created became subject to disease, death, toil and strife when men chose to disobey God and listen to Satan's cunning temptation to know both evil & good. Much has gone awry from God's original order of things.

Genesis 3:17 [God said to Adam] "Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat food from it all the days of your life. 18 It will produce thorns and thistles for you...19 By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground"

Irresponsible managing of the earth

We see in Genesis that the Lord gave it to mankind to be in charge of the earth to care for and tend it.

Psalm 8 What is mankind that you are mindful of them...You made them rulers over the works of your hands; you put everything under their feet: all flocks and herds, and the animals of the wild, the birds in the sky, and the fish in the sea, all that swim the paths of the seas.

And we see many wonderful works of men. But we see in scientific research today that sometimes we act unwisely, irresponsibly and greedily in our tending of the earth and its environment, for example in the releasing of toxins into the food or atmosphere or water, resulting in suffering because of these unwise actions.

Satan's evil attacks against us

We are instructed in scripture:

"Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour." 1 Peter 5:8

Satan always acts according to his evil nature and rebellion. He tries to lure us away from God through the deceptive glamour of evil pleasures, or cause such harm to come to us that we are so hurt and discouraged we will doubt God's love and goodness and turn our hearts firmly and angrily against the very God who loves and created us.

Things others have done to us

The Bible is full of accounts of men's sinful choices harming others, from the first sons of Adam where one brother killed the other.

Genesis 5:8 Now Cain said to his brother Abel, "Let's go out to the field." While they were in the field, Cain attacked his brother Abel and killed him.

Further along we see the Lord speak against whole nations for their evil deeds.

Isaiah 30:12 Therefore this is what the Holy One of Israel says: "Because you have rejected this message, relied on oppression and depended on deceit, 13 this sin will become for you like a high wall, cracked and bulging, that collapses suddenly, in an instant.

The commandments of God and the teaching of Christ and the apostles instruct us clearly in how we should relate to God and treat one another. We are responsible for knowing and following His instructions, rather than following our own natural way of thinking.

Natural consequences of our own choices

God loves us and ultimately wants us to prosper and be blessed and succeed. From the early Biblical writings in Deuteronomy and throughout scripture, we are told that we will get a good result when we obey God's instructions (even when suffering harm from others) and this will lead to our greatest happiness--and that we will get a bad result when we disobey and ignore God's instructions-- leading us to destruction and death.

Deuteronomy 30:19 *[The Lord to His people] This day I call the heavens and the earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live **20** and that you may love the Lord your God, listen to his voice, and hold fast to him. For the Lord is your life...*

God's loving discipline to draw us away from evil and to Himself

God tells us that He disciplines us as a loving Father, to correct us and turn us back from wrong.

Hebrews 12:5-10 "My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when He rebukes you, **6** because the Lord disciplines the one He loves, and He chastens everyone He accepts as his son." **7** *Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as his children. For what children are not disciplined by their father?... **10** They disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, in order that we may share in his holiness.*

God's redemptive judgements

When we heed God's disciplines our lives are set aright and all is well, but when we stubbornly refuse to obey over and over and cause countless harm and brokenness to ourselves and everyone around us and ignore and dishonor God, he will go to great lengths to seek to correct and restore us to Himself because He so deeply loves us. We see this in the story of the Israelite people--God's chosen people in the Biblical story. God brought them out of great oppression in Egypt into a wonderful land of promise and plenty. But they ruefully rebelled and ignored God's commands and became oppressive and hurtful and harmful themselves. God sent prophet after prophet to warn them to turn back and obey. But they did not. So out of God's great heart of love to restore His people to Himself, He had to resort to greater extremes in allowing great calamity to come upon them from invading armies, resulting in great loss and grief to God's beloved people. This greatly pained the Lord to go to such extremes--but all through it His purposes and promise was to get their attention so they could be restored to Himself and to blessing. This is sometimes referred to as a redemptive judgement--in reality a rescue. This can happen to whole nations or people groups or to individuals. A man of God named Jonah ended up in the belly of a whale until he decided to get on the right track and was spit out. Here are some warnings of the prophets:

Jeremiah 3:12 "Return, faithless Israel,' declares the Lord, 'I will frown on you no longer, for I am faithful,' declares the Lord, 'I will not be angry forever."

Hosea 6:1 "Come, let us return to the Lord. He has torn us to pieces but he will heal us; he has

injured us but he will bind up our wounds.”

Jeremiah 31:3 The Lord appeared to us in the past, saying: “I have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with unfailing kindness.

God is forming His adopted children into the character of Christ

The Lord calls all believers--all His children who have been adopted into His forever family--to follow after the example of Christ in humble obedience, even to the point of suffering for doing what is right in God’s eyes.

Matthew 16:24 Then Jesus said to his disciples, “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. **25** For whoever wants to save their life^[a] will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it. **26** What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul? **27** For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father’s glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what they have done.

Persecution against the followers of Christ

Christ told His followers they will be persecuted by others, but to stay strong. And the sufferings of the children of God show forth the glory and character of Christ when we respond as Christ did.

Matthew 5:10-12 Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. **11** “Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. **12** Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

The example of Job

In the book of Job in the Bible, we see that sometimes the ways of God are too great for us to understand. There is a battle for our lives taking place in the cosmos between God and Satan, the angels and demons. There is no exact formula to understand the prosperity and sufferings of this life. After Job, a fully righteous man, had suffered much and questioned God, the Lord said to Him:

Job 40:1-2 “Job, you challenged Almighty God; will you give up now, or will you answer?”

[Job replies:] “I spoke foolishly, Lord, what can I answer? I will not try to say anything else. I have already said more than I should.”

What is very clear from the story of Job is that God is all powerful and His character is fully good and just and can be trusted. At the conclusion of the story, after the time of testing, God blessed Job twice as much as He had in the beginning.

And though we may struggle & be confused at seeing wicked people prosper, God assures He is just:

Psalms 92:6-8 Senseless people do not know..., **7** that though the wicked spring up like grass and all evildoers flourish, they will be destroyed forever. **8** But you, Lord, are forever exalted.

WE SEE THIS THEME OF GOD'S POWER AND TRUSTWORTHY CHARACTER DEMONSTRATED THROUGHOUT SCRIPTURE, AND PARTICULARLY IN THE HERO OF THE STORY, JESUS CHRIST, WHO WE ARE TOLD IS THE EXACT LIKENESS OF THE HEAVENLY FATHER.

THURSDAY

THE HERO OF THE STORY!

Hebrews 1:3 The Son {who is Jesus Christ} is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word.

GOD HAS A REMEDY for every kind of suffering. He did not and does not leave us helpless in our suffering. He provided a mighty rescue!

Throughout the Bible we see that though God's heart was to bless His people if they would only obey Him. Over and over again they failed, just like us. When He delivered them from bondage in Egypt and conquered all their enemies and took them into a land of promise and blessing and plenty, they failed Him again. They didn't just fail a little bit, they failed a lot. The Lord, the just judge, the passionate loving Father had a plan we see from the beginning of the story to rescue His people. From the time of man's first sin the Lord foretold through prophetic words a Messiah who would save man from our sinful rebellious ways. These prophecies run through scripture until finally in the book of Matthew the Messiah appears on the scene--born as a man, yet fully God--born by the promise of an angel to the virgin Mary to be conceived of the Holy Spirit. He was born, lived a perfect life, taught and performed many acts of power. But He was pursued by jealous leaders who gained the opinions of the people to ask the Roman rulers of the day to put Him to death. And so as we know He died an excruciating painful death on the cross. And God purposed and planned this as a substitute death to pay for OUR sins, that we might be made right with God. This great plan of God carried out God's justice to redeem while punishing sin, and defeated the work of Satan once and for all:

Colossians 2:13 When you were dead in your sins ...God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, 14 having canceled the charge of our legal indebtedness, which stood against us and condemned us; He has taken it away, nailing it to the cross. 15 And having disarmed the powers and authorities [meaning the principalities in Heavenly places], He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.

THE SUFFERING SERVANT, JESUS CHRIST, WHO GAVE HIS VERY LIFE FOR US BECAUSE OF HIS GREAT LOVE FOR US, IS THE EXACT REPRESENTATION OF WHO THE FATHER IS. HE DISPROVED ALL SATAN'S LIES AGAINST GOD AND SHOWED HIS CHARACTER CLEARLY TO MAN.

AND SO TO ALL who turn from our wrongdoing and put our trust in Christ we are restored to the blessings and promises of God and adopted as God's very children, though we don't deserve it. He gives us a new heart and a new spirit with the power to obey God. We are restored to relationship with the Heavenly Father to enjoy Him forever.

AND SO WHERE IS GOD IN OUR CURRENT SUFFERINGS?

SO WE START WITH THE FACT that we can TRUST God's character. We see clearly, against all questioning and dispute, the greatness of God's love and goodness in Jesus Christ.

We see in scripture that God is just, and while He makes no promises to hear the prayers of the wayward who give no attention to following His commands, He does promise to hear the cries of His children--those who are made right with Him through Christ and seek to walk in obedience.

Psalm 34:15 The eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and his ears are attentive to their cry; 16 but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil,

God Promises to Be With His Children in Our Suffering

Whether we suffer for our own wrongdoing, or the wrongs others commit against us, or as a matter of mild or major discipline, or testing and forming our character, or persecution, or for reasons we cannot fully understand--God promises to be with His children in our suffering. And in these places, we discover His powerful love and might and power in ways we miss in the busyness of everyday life. The scriptures and Saints of God testify that the presence and goodness of God discovered even through suffering, is their greatest joy and fulfillment, far exceeding any other.

Psalm 46:1-7 God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. 2 Therefore we will not fear, though the earth gives way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea, 3 though its waters roar and foam and the mountains quake with their surging. 4 There is a river [the Holy Spirit] whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy place where the Most High dwells [in our hearts until we enter His presence forever in heaven]. 5 God is within her, she will not fall; God will help her at break of day. 6 Nations are in uproar, kingdoms fall; he lifts his voice, the earth melts. 7 The Lord Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress.

Psalm 62:3 Because your love [Lord] is better than life, my lips will glorify you. 4 I will praise you as long as I live,

God's Children can Come to Him for Protection, Help, Comfort, Provision, Healing

For God's children, the Lord offers strength, joy, peace in the midst of whatever we are facing, and He makes many helps and comforts available to us and we see these throughout scripture. We see many displays of His power and help and victory.

Psalm 145:17-19 The Lord is just in all his ways, and kind in all his doings. The Lord is near to all who call upon him, to all who call upon him in truth. He fulfills the desire of all who fear him, he also hears their cry, and saves them.

God Promises His Children to Use all Suffering for Our Good

There are many cases in scripture of the Lord's help to His children who call on Him, yet it makes clear there are no guarantees in this life that we will not suffer. But for those who trust in the Lord and His ways, He promises that if we do suffer for a time for whatever reason, He will turn it into something good--in this life and the next. For those who trust in the Lord, nothing can ultimately defeat us--not trouble or suffering or even death.

Romans 8:28 And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.

SATURDAY

CONCLUSION

As we continue life in this broken world, our life is to prepare us for the next life and this life is a daily choosing. A choosing on whether we will escape the path of destruction left to those who ignore God's commands and God's mercy--and a choosing for the children of God in the daily option to rely upon the spirit that gives us the power to obey no matter what the circumstances, to daily ask for forgiveness when we fail and to daily trust in Him and call upon His help, hope, comfort, protection, goodness--and rest in His wonderful love.

PSALM 36:5-12

**Your love, Lord, reaches to the heavens,
your faithfulness to the skies.**

**6 Your righteousness is like the highest mountains,
your justice like the great deep.
You, Lord, preserve both people and animals.**

**7 How priceless is your unfailing love, O God!
People take refuge in the shadow of your wings.**

**8 They feast on the abundance of your house;
you give them drink from your river of delights.**

**9 For with you is the fountain of life;
in your light we see light.**

**10 Continue your love to those who know you,
your righteousness to the upright in heart.**

**11 May the foot of the proud not come against me,
nor the hand of the wicked drive me away.**

**12 See how the evildoers lie fallen—
thrown down, not able to rise!**

HOW CAN I BE SURE I AM GOD'S CHILD?

Contrary to popular notion, while the scriptures say we are all created in God's image, they also make it clear that we are outside His Kingdom family until we are born again.

John 3:3-5

*Jesus replied "Very truly I tell you, **no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again**...Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the Kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit."*

We become God's child when we recognize our need to be made right with God and ask His forgiveness, receive a new heart and receive new life in Christ. This is being saved or born again. **When we are saved, we are adopted into God's forever family and the way is opened to us for a close and intimate relationship with the Lord and King of All! We receive the precious gift of eternal life and become recipients of all the Lord's great and precious promises to help us through this life and help us have life to the full--the most fulfilling life possible offered by Christ in John 10:10! This is what His Word says:**

Romans 3:23

For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

Romans 6:23

For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

John 1:12

Yet to all who did receive Him...He gave the right to become children of God—

II Corinthians 5:17

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation: The old has gone, the new is here!

You can pray now to be saved if you have not done this: "Dear Lord Jesus, I need to ask for your forgiveness for all the ways I have ignored your commands, disobeyed you, hurt and harmed others, and messed up. I am sorry Lord and I thank you that you died on the cross for my sins to save me and to make me a part of your family forever! Would You forgive me and come into my life right now to be Lord of my life and give me a new heart? Would you place your spirit in me and help me to obey you? Thank you for all you have done for me! Amen."