

NICK GUY
& THE
BAD THINGS/GOOD PEOPLE AFFAIR
NICK GUY, VOLUME 24

RELEASE DATE: Fall 2016

THEME: Suffering is a part of everyone's life. Why we suffer is a question men have asked throughout the ages. Why is there suffering in the world? Why do some men suffer little and other men suffer much? Why do the innocent suffer as well as those who are evil, and sometimes to a greater degree. Does the existence of suffering in the world cast doubt on the goodness and/or the sovereignty of God?

THE PROBLEM OF SUFFERING: All men suffer. It is the common lot of all those who live in this world. And perhaps one of the most difficult questions to answer is: "Why?"

Suffering also leads us to wonder, where is God in the midst of suffering. Why does suffering exist? Why does God allow it?

SUFFERING AND THE GOD'S GOODNESS/SOVREIGNTY DILEMMA: Christians maintain that God is good and that He is all-powerful. Many critics of Christianity will charge that suffering in the world is proof that God is either not good or not all-powerful or both. The argument goes like this: If God is good, He would want to eliminate suffering. If God is all-powerful, He is able to eliminate suffering. Since suffering exists God is either unwilling to eliminate it (meaning He is not good) or He is unable to eliminate it (meaning He is not all-powerful).

First of all, the Bible never presents the Christian life as one of ease. In fact, Jesus promised His disciples (which includes His followers today) trouble (John 16:2, 33). And history reveals that, from time to time, this is exactly what has happened.

THE GENERAL ANSWER: In General, suffering is the result of sin. When Adam sinned, suffering, corruption and ultimately death were introduced into the world. It was through that one man's disobedience that suffering entered into the world.

With this understanding, we see that God is not responsible for suffering in the world, man is. Adam was a free moral agent, and as a free moral agent he freely chose to reject God's authority and His commands, and go his own way. The consequence was a world subjected to the curse.

THE SPECIFIC ANSWER: But there is a deeper, and certainly more perplexing, question that suffering elicits. Why is it that some men suffer much, while others suffer

comparatively little? Why is it that the innocent suffer alongside the wicked, and, in some cases, more so than the wicked? There appears to be no rhyme or reason.

These are good questions. A simplistic answer blames personal suffering on personal sin. One suffers in direct correlation to his own sins. This was the understanding of Job's friends. Job, in the Old Testament book that bears his name, is described as "Blameless and upright, one who feared God and turned away from evil." Yet, he suffered greatly. In a short period of time, Job lost all he had, and then, finally, his health as well. His friends came to comfort him. They assumed that his suffering was the result of some gross sin on his part, and counseled him to repent of his sin and ask God for forgiveness. The problem with that counsel was that Job's suffering was not the result of some personal, gross sin.

So why this inequity in suffering? The answer is two-fold. As regards a specific individual in a specific situation: We don't know. For us to know that we would need to know the full counsel of God. But we do know, at least in part, how God uses suffering.

According to Romans 8:28, "And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose." Although suffering is not pleasant, God has a purpose in it that is ultimately for our good.

THE PURPOSE OF LIFE: To better understand this, let us back up a bit and get a clear understanding of God's ultimate purpose. One of the reasons we have a problem understanding suffering is because we have a wrong perspective of the purpose of life. We judge suffering from our perspective. God's perspective is much different. Remember Isaiah 55:8,9 where God tells us:

"For my thoughts are not your thoughts,
neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord.
For as the heavens are higher than the earth,
so are my ways higher than your ways
and my thoughts than your thoughts."

So what is God's highest priority? If it is to give us lives of ease, with no suffering and no pain, then He has failed miserably. On the other hand, if His highest priority is for His own glory, then we see how suffering can be used to that end.

EXAMPLES OF GOD'S PURPOSE IN SUFFERING: The Bible is filled with examples of God fulfilling His purposes through suffering.

Take the example of Joseph from the Book of Genesis. He had suffered much primarily because of the sin of his brothers. But because of that suffering, Joseph was in a position to save his entire family (including his brothers) from famine. Joseph's brothers feared he would retaliate for their mistreatment of him. But Joseph, in an incredibly insightful statement recognized God's purpose in the whole situation. In

Genesis 50:20 he said this to his brothers: “As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today.”

Hebrews 11:24-26 gives us this testimony concerning Moses: “By faith Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to be mistreated with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin. He considered the reproach of Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking to the reward.”

THE BENEFITS OF SUFFERING: Also, in accordance with Romans 8:28, we find there is great benefit for us in suffering.

First of all, suffering teaches us the results of sin, that the wages of sin is death. God also uses suffering to humble us and making us more dependent upon Him.

COMFORT IN SUFFERING: All of the theological answers do not always soothe the pain of those who are suffering with a debilitating illness, or with the loss of a loved one, or with on-going financial or mental stress and struggles. So what can we say to the individual in these situations that can comfort them.

As we mentioned earlier, to be able to know the exact purpose of specific suffering we would have to know the mind of God. We seldom know the plan for good that God has in these situations. But we do have the promise that God is good and that He is all-powerful, and that He works all things (no matter how hard, no matter how devastating) for good.

We also have some examples in Scripture of how God used suffering to bring about His good and gracious plan.

One is the story of Joseph that we looked at earlier. Joseph's suffering was God's means of saving the Israelite Nation from famine.

Also, John 9 tells the story of a man who had been blind from birth. Jesus was asked whose sin was responsible for this blindness. Was it the man's sin, or his parent's sin? Jesus answered: “Neither.” This man was born blind so that the majesty of God could be manifest.

But perhaps the most dramatic example we have of God using suffering for good is in the story of Jesus Himself. The point can be made no stronger than in the Cross of Christ. The greatest suffering, that of the Crucifixion of Jesus, led to the greatest manifestation of God's majesty: The salvation of men.

In John 12, Jesus Himself, as He faced crucifixion, said: “What shall I say? ‘Father,

save me from this hour'? But for this purpose I have come to this hour. Father, glorify your name."

THE ULTIMATE SUFFERING, AND THE JUSTICE OF GOD: A question that is routinely brought before the Christian involves the ultimate suffering (eternity in Hell) and the goodness and the justice of God. Isn't God unjust when He condemns innocent people to eternal suffering who have never heard the Gospel and have never had the opportunity either accept or reject it?"

To answer this question, we need to examine Romans 1:18-21, which reads:

"For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse."

This universal exposure to God's wrath is explained in this first chapter of Romans in terms of God's anger against humanity for a specific sin. And that sin is the suppression of the truth of God, that God has plainly and clearly communicated through creation to every single man and woman.

Concerning this section of Scripture, Dr. R.C. Sproul has said, "Paul goes on to say here that even the invisible things of God, His eternal power and deity, are known thru the things that are made. That the visible world manifests, not obscurely, but manifestly and clearly the eternal power and deity of God to such a degree, the Apostle says, that it leaves every human being without an excuse.

And this guilt is apart from the Gospel. The Gospel came into a world that was already under the indictment of God. Men are not condemned for rejecting Jesus, of Whom they've never heard, but for suppression the truth of the God who has revealed Himself to them through Creation. God does not condemn men for what they don't know, but rather for what they do know.

CONCLUSION: Suffering is something that all men experience to varying degrees. The only comfort we can have or give in times of suffering is to look to the One who has promised that no suffering.

As Dr. R.C. Sproul has said, "God is the Lord of life, He is the Lord of death, He is the Lord of suffering, He is the Lord of pain. If there is a God who is Lord over all...what that means is that it is impossible that any pain could every be without purpose."

As Jesus Himself said in John 16:33 - "In the world you will have tribulation. But take

heart; I have overcome the world.”

RESOURCES: R.C. Sproul, Surprised by Suffering; book and audio
www.vimeo.com/109159669