

# WHY?

## SERIES DEVOTIONAL

"SUFFERING & PERSPECTIVE" | SUNDAY, MAY 10, 2020

GRACE  
FELLOWSHIP

"[Pain is] God's megaphone to rouse a deaf world." – C.S. Lewis

### KEY THOUGHT

# #1

**Through the megaphone of suffering, God calls us to repent.**

*"There were some present at that very time who told him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. <sup>2</sup> And he answered them, "Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans, because they suffered in this way? <sup>3</sup> No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish. <sup>4</sup> Or those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them: do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others who lived in Jerusalem? <sup>5</sup> No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish."* (Luke 13:1-5)

In this passage, Jesus responds to a question about why tragedies occur by reminding the questioners that we live in a broken, fallen world, and so bad things happen to everyone. Sometimes tragedy is the result of a person's bad choice, such as Pilate's decision to slaughter freedom-loving Galileans who had gathered to protest his stealing money from the temple treasury (v.1-2). Sometimes tragedy is the result of a freak accident, such as when a tower in Siloam fell and killed eighteen people (v.4). Regardless of the cause of suffering, Jesus tells us (twice!) we must all repent and be prepared to meet God (v.3, 5).

In his essay "Beyond the Pleasure Principle," Sigmund Freud wrote that the "pleasure principle"—the desire to maximize pleasure and avoid pain—is our primary motivation as human beings. But this drive for indulgence is deceptive because it tells us that we have a "right" to a world that is fair and predictable, and to a life that guarantees ease and comfort. While there is nothing wrong with fairness, predictability, ease, and comfort in and of themselves, they can subtly become idols in our lives. We can easily begin to pursue the temporary pleasures of the world (which never fully satisfy) rather than seeking God who is the ultimate Source of peace, joy, hope, and security. Thus, God, who always has our best interest in mind, allows suffering to invade our lives as a call for us to repent from self-consuming attitudes and to turn to Him.

God promises no one—not even Christians— an exemption from any of life's hurts. If it is your goal to never suffer, you are setting yourself up for disappointment. You will never come to accept adversity and trials as normal, and you may miss God's loving call to look to Him. Jesus warned His followers, "*In the world you will have tribulation*" but He also assured them, "*But take heart; I have overcome the world.*" (John 16:33)

### TALK ABOUT IT:

- James 4:14 says, "*You do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes.*" How can the idea that our life is just a temporary mist affect our view of suffering?
- Do you agree that God always has your best interest in mind? Why or why not?

## KEY THOUGHT

# #2

## Through the megaphone of suffering, God calls us to pray.

*“Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. <sup>7</sup> And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 4:6-7)*

*“If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him.” (James 1:5)*

When life knocks you to your knees, don't get up—that's the best position from which to pray about your problems! In Philippians 4:6 (above), Paul tells us that God invites us to pray about *everything*, and James encourages us to ask particularly for wisdom when we're suffering (James 1:5 above). James also assures us that God never becomes impatient with our asking.

Many times, in desperation, we'll turn to other places and people first instead of going to our heavenly Father. Giving in to self-reliance and fear, we find ourselves going down wrong paths, wavering, and becoming weaker rather than growing stronger in the trial. But God wants us to make Him our first choice, not our last chance! Corrie ten Boom said, “Make prayer your steering wheel, not your spare tire.” Time with the Lord in prayer is top priority—especially when we're hurting. In Him we find real comfort and peace and come away emotionally settled.

As we pray, though, we must keep in mind that God loves us too much to say yes to everything we ask for. We can always trust that God has our very best interests in mind, and He will answer our prayers accordingly. Because He cares so deeply for us, He grants to us that which is in accordance with His good will for our lives. Here are four ways God answers our prayers:

When the request is wrong, God says, “No—it is not good for you.”

When the timing is wrong, God says, “Slow—you'll receive it in My timing.”

When the person is not ready, God says “Grow—you're not ready yet for it.”

When everything is right, God says “Go—receive it as My blessing.”

God knows what's best for you, and everything He does in your life, He does for your good. Romans 8:28 says, “*We know that all things work together for the good of those who love God, who are called according to his purpose.*” God's path may be a path of pain, but all those problems are drawing you to Him, and the closer you are to God, the more blessed and less stressed you'll be! “*Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you*” (James 4:8).

## TALK ABOUT IT:

- Why do you think some people make prayer their last chance rather than their first choice when suffering?
- In addition to wisdom (James 1:5), what else should we ask God for when we're suffering?
- Besides prayer, what are some other ways we can draw closer to God?

## KEY THOUGHT

# #3

## Through the megaphone of suffering, God calls us to prioritize.

*“Let the lowly brother boast in his exaltation,<sup>10</sup> and the rich in his humiliation, because like a flower of the grass he will pass away.” (James 1:9-10)*

James tells us that suffering is the great equalizer—it teaches both the rich and poor what really matters in life. God may allow us to be in a difficult place so we can realize what is really important in life.

In his poem “Along the Road” Robert Browning Hamilton wrote:

“I walked a mile with Pleasure; she chatted all the way;  
But left me none the wiser, for all she had to say.  
I walked a mile with Sorrow; and ne’er a word said she;  
But, oh! The things I learned from her, when Sorrow walked with me.”

God knows exactly what buttons to push and what trials and crisis to allow in our lives to help us evaluate our priorities. He wants our first passion to be to allow Christ’s character to form in our lives. He wants our top interests to include experiencing the fruit of the Spirit in and through our lives: love, joy peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness, self-control (Galatians 5:22-23). And He uses suffering to cause us to pause, pray, and readjust our priorities.

Helen Keller became very sick as a young girl. She recovered from her illness, but she would never again be able to see or hear. Helen became overwhelmed by her life of darkness and her isolation from the images and voices of everyone she loved. She became filled with resentment—she thought her life was over. But Helen’s parents hired a gifted teacher, Annie Sullivan, who taught Helen to communicate by reading words on her hands. Helen was eventually able to attend college, and she become an author and an educator to the blind and deaf. Helen traveled around the world inspiring people because of the great obstacles she had overcome. Helen had learned the value of the character-building effects of suffering. She said, “Character cannot be developed in ease and quiet. Only through experience of trial and suffering can the soul be strengthened, vision cleared, ambition inspired, and success achieved...The struggle of life is one of our greatest blessings. It makes us patient, sensitive, and Godlike.”

## TALK ABOUT IT:

- What can a rich person learn through suffering? What can a poor person learn through suffering?
- In Robert Browning Hamilton’s poem “Along the Road” (above), why do you think “Sorrow’s” silence is louder than “Pleasure’s” constant chattering in our lives?
- When has suffering motivated you to evaluate and adjust priorities in your life?
- Do you agree with Helen Keller that “Character cannot be developed in ease and quiet”? Why or why not?