

The Question of the Book of Job

Why do the innocent suffer?

INTRODUCTION:

Too often we as Christians have unknowingly bought into easy-believism of health and wealth, or name it and claim it theology, and effectively bury our heads in the sand to stories of great suffering. We don't want to read Job because it scares us. We fear it might happen to us. So we whistle in the dark, close our eyes to suffering and pretend it isn't so.

Stories of Great Suffering

Reading stories of lives like Helen Keller and Joni Erickson Tada can help prepare us for the eventful day when great trials may come our way to test the resolve and depth of our faith in a loving God.

- *Unbroken* – Laura Hillenbrand – Louis Zamperini story
- *Into Thin Air* – Jon Krakauer – Climb Mt Everest
- *River of Doubt* – Candice Millard – Teddy Roosevelt dark journey
- *Follow the River* – James Alexander Thorn – Mary Draper Ingles
- *The Hiding Place* – Corrie Ten Boom – imprisoned in Nazi Germany
- *Joni* – Joni Erickson Tada – quadriplegic from her teens
- *The Story of My Life* – Helen Keller – autobiography of one deaf/blind
- *The Dark Journey* – Allan W. Eckert *The Donner Party*

Prepared for Suffering and Loss

Jesus urged us to build our house on a rock rather than sand so that when the winds blow, the rains fall, and flood come our house won't be washed away.

Matthew 7:24-27

24 *“Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock.*

25 *The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock.*

26 *But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand.*

27 *The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash.”*

There Are Many Helpful Books on the Subject of Suffering

There are helpful books thoughtfully written that go much deeper into the subject of suffering and trials than we can in our study.

- Phillip Yancy - *Where's God When it Hurts?*
- Phillip Yancy – *Disappointment with God*
- CS Lewis – *The Problem of Pain*
- Harold Kushner – *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*
- Richard LaFountain – *Restoring Shattered Faith*

The Book of Why's?

The story of the book of Job is the story of the mystery of suffering. It is also the book of Why? It explores the great unanswerable questions of life and death. It explores the questions of "*Where's God When It Hurts?*" and "*Disappointments with God.*" It explores the question of *Why God? Why me? Why this?* and *What have I ever done to deserve this?*"

- Why does God allow suffering?
- Did God create evil? If so, does that make Him bad?
- Why did God create the devil? Why doesn't God just blow him away?
- If God is all good and all knowing and all powerful why doesn't He stop suffering?
- What did I ever do to deserve this calamity?
- Why is God silent when we need Him the most?

We cannot possibly explore all these questions in the short time we have together, but we can look carefully at the life and suffering of Job and glean from him truths that will be anchors for our souls when we face unexplained tragedies and sickness.

Then and Now

The questions that Job's friends tried to answer unsuccessfully were issues of the cause of Job's trials. All of them were steeped in the traditions of religious opinions – 1) Job sinned therefore God was punishing him 2) Job has hidden sin therefore God was chastising him. Even the disciples and people in Jesus day were still wrestling with the same issues. Even though they had the book of Job they still thought that sickness and suffering were directly related to some sin or failure of the individual or their parents. (Jesus corrected them on this just as God corrects Job's friends.)

In all of the dialogs in Job concerning evil not once is it ever hinted at that God was evil or that He did not exist.

Yet the question that troubles our generation is not so much the why does someone suffers but the very existence of evil and suffering in the world. In today's secular society that question is used as a rant against God and His existence.

Larry King Live on Good and Evil

Larry King on his Larry King Live program on CNN beats on this question repeatedly. It seems to be his mantra whether it be with Ravi Zacharias, James Dobson, Billy Graham, or John MacArthur the question is the same:

"How can God exist who allows children to be abducted and murdered?"

"If God is omnipotent why do tragedies like earthquakes and hurricanes happen? No religious leader has ever been able to answer that for me."

In fact Larry King is disingenuous in that argument. All of those men have answered that question, but not to his satisfaction. Larry King is not the originator of that question.

Epicurus

Epicurus, the Greek philosopher from 300 BC also asked the question and used similar logic to rant against God.

"Is God willing to prevent evil, but not able? Then he is not omnipotent. Is he is able, but not willing? Then he is malevolent. Is he both able and willing? Then from whence comes evil?"

The idea Epicurus postulated was that God is in a dilemma. In the light of the existence of evil He is either unwilling or unable to deal with evil, therefore He probably doesn't exist, or evil is more pervasive and powerful than God.

The Most Ancient of All Questions

Job is the most ancient of biblical stories. It existed in oral form for many centuries. Even the Babylonian documents tell the story of Job, but with a different name and different conclusions. The book of Job was compiled sometime during Solomon's reign in a poetic form and for this reason is part of the Poetical Books of Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and Song of Solomon. So the question of evil and suffering go back to the beginning of time.

Although the Book of Job does not provide us the answers of their day or of our generation yet it does provide us with insights into the value and purpose of trials and suffering whether they be mammoth like Job's sudden losses or everyday occurrences such as accidents, acts of nature, viruses and cancers.

As we begin the Book of Job let us start by examining this argument against the goodness and omnipotence of God by asking and debating some fundamental questions.

If you were God how would you solve the problem of evil in the world?

How would you answer Larry King's questions about God and evil?

- Did God create evil? If not, where did it come from?
- Did God create the devil? If so, why?
- Why doesn't God destroy the devil?
- Does God cause and/or control tragedies?
- Does God control everything? Is He sovereign over all?
- Does the existence of evil serve God's eternal purpose?
- Why does God allow evil to happen to innocent children?
- Did God create Hell? Why?
- If God can stop evil events but does not, is He then evil, unloving or powerless?

According to John MacArthur there are three kinds of evil.

- 1) Natural evils – earthquakes, volcanoes, fire, wind, sharks, snakes, poisons, etc.
- 2) Moral evils – people do bad things, people sin, people kill, etc.
- 3) Spiritual evil – Satan and demons

If you want God to destroy all evil then would He not have to destroy you as well?

If I were to argue with Larry King I would point out the following.

1. **There is evil (bad things) in nature** – even evolutionists believe in a big bang, survival of the fittest, earth is dying, meteorites, collisions of stars, black holes, diseases, bacteria, viruses, etc. Since evil, suffering, injustice, tragedies are part of nature why do you rail against God and praise evolution and survival of the fittest? Why does God (whom you say does not exist) suddenly become public enemy Number One? If God doesn't exist then leave Him out of the argument.
2. **Evil itself is the result of the law of opposites** – everything in our earthly experience requires an opposite. You cannot have up without down, left without right, top/bottom, in/out, white/black, over/under, go/come, life/death, before/behind, wet/dry, clean/dirty, earth/sky, sweet/sour, salt/pepper, light/darkness, day/night, right/wrong, good/bad, justice/injustice, moral/immoral, heaven/hell, and good/evil.
3. **Evil and good are moral judgments.** They are not taught in nature. Therefore the very fact that you conceive of a moral world (that does not exist) testifies to the fact that there must be a Moral Lawgiver. Eternity is written in your heart. You have a conscience. Where did that come from? Society? Where did society get it? Animals don't have it. Where do humans get it?
4. **Evil is tolerated and practiced but certain evils are intolerable.** There is a double standard in those who accuse God of evil. God can't allow innocent children to die or be murdered, but you can advocate and rejoice in the killing of unborn babies in the womb. Where is justice in that? What once was universally called evil you now call good. What you once declared a perversion is now acceptable. Therefore your view of evil is distorted. How can you then judge God?

1 Peter 3:15

*But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord.
Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks
you to give the reason for the hope that you have.
But do this with gentleness and respect,*