

604 "Does God Love Me?"

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God's Answers to Life's Questions

Life can hand out some bitter experiences, which leave us feeling awfully alone and hurting. The loss of a loved one, a broken marriage, a life-threatening disease, or a financial reverse can leave us depressed and discouraged. We wonder why all this has happened to us, and in our heart of hearts we question if God really loves us. If God genuinely loves us, why does He let bad things happen to us? If God loves us why couldn't He have prevented all the tragic things that happen in our lives and spared us so much pain and turmoil? Does God really love me, when He allows me to go through this pain and suffering?

Whatever difficulty you are going through right now, I want you to know that there has never been one day, one hour, one minute, one second, or even a fraction of a second that God has not loved you. The God of Heaven created you; He is the Father of your spirit; He gave you life; He provides for you daily; He knows the number of hairs on your head; and He has given you His Son Jesus to pay for your sins and to wash you clean from sin by His blood. The God of Heaven sacrificed His Son for your sake, allowed Him to take the cruel, hateful, and severe punishment that was due for your sins. Yes, my friend the Lord loves you.

Paul said in Romans 5:6-8, "For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die—but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." The Lord does not love you because you are so good, so beautiful, so rich, so famous, or so talented. He does not love you because you deserve His love. He loves you in your weakness, in your ungodliness, and in your sin. He loves you in spite of your past or your failures. He knows the good and the bad about you and loves you anyway.

"Well if God loves me, why am I suffering?" you ask. There are many reasons why God allows suffering in this world. Some people reason that the only way you can love someone is to prevent them from suffering. Certainly, our loving parents kept us from many hurts and scrapes. There were times, however, that our parents permitted us to have small pains now to prevent bigger pains later. We took shots to keep from getting diseases; we went to the dentist to avoid problems later in life. We didn't understand why we hurt at the time, but we thanked our parents for giving us the care we needed at the time. God also gives us that kind of care.

Sometimes the little disappointments of life today are just what we need to keep us from a greater suffering down the way. There is an old saying, "Be careful what you ask for, you may well get it." The story is told of a Chinese man who had one horse and one son. One day the horse broke out of the corral and fled to the hills. All of the neighbors came around and said, "Your horse got out? What bad luck!" The old Chinese man said, "Why, how do you know it's bad luck?" Sure enough, the next night the horse came back to his familiar corral for his usual feeding and watering, leading twelve wild stallions with him! The farmer's son slipped out and locked the gate. The neighbors heard the good news and came excitedly to the farmer. "Oh, you have thirteen horses! What good luck!" And the old Chinese man answered, "How do you know that it's good luck?" A few days later the young son was trying to break one of the wild stallions only to be thrown off and break a leg. The neighbors came back saying, "Your son broke his leg. What bad luck!" And the wise father said, "How do you know it's bad luck?" Sure enough, a few days later a Chinese war lord came through town and conscripted every able-bodied young man, taking them off to war, never to return again. The young man was saved because of his broken leg. This

story helps us understand the problem of trying to interpret God's providence too close to the fact. While we are suffering, we have the tendency to think this is the worst possible situation. Because of this, it is easy to doubt the love and kindness of God when we are suffering from some problem.

God takes care of us as a loving Father in heaven. One thing a father does is discipline his children; he doesn't do this to be cruel but to train his children to do what is right and to avoid what is wrong. Many loving fathers have corrected their children with a wake up call on the seat of their pants to get a child to listen and to obey.

The Hebrew writer in Hebrews 12:5-11 uses this experience familiar to all of us. He writes: "And have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons? 'My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him. For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives.'" It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline? If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. Besides this, we have had earthly fathers who disciplined us and we respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live? For they disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them, but he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness. For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it." Discipline, whether by our earthly fathers or by the Father in heaven, is not unloving. It is what we need to develop our character as we grow and mature. It is better to learn to obey from a parent's swat than from a policeman's handcuffs. We have all seen the effects of an undisciplined child.

How does God discipline us? Sometimes it is through allowing us to bear the consequences of our own sins. Sometimes we bring trouble down upon our own heads by the bad choices we make in life. There is an unalterable law of life found in Galatians 6:7-8, "Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap. For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life." If a man regularly gets drunk or uses drugs, he should not be surprised to find that he has physical problems from it or finds himself in trouble with the law.

If any person is sexually promiscuous, he/she should not be surprised that he/she has a socially transmitted disease. A woman may find herself pregnant out of wedlock. Is this God's fault? People who get caught up in sin and have to bear the consequences of their sinful behavior should not look at God and say "why did this happen to me?" They should look at themselves and say, "Why did I not listen to God's will?" God loved you enough to warn you in His word to stay away from immoral behavior. God loves you enough to give you choices in life; if you choose to live outside His will, you also break His heart. Have you thought about the pain you give to God.

Not every problem is the result of your own sin. Sometimes we are hurt by other people's sinful attitudes and wicked ways. I think of Joseph, whose brothers sold him into slavery. Later the lust-filled wife of his master Potiphar falsely accused him and had him put in prison for many years. Through all of it, the Bible says "the Lord was with him" (Genesis 39:3, 21). Just because we go through terrible times does not mean the Lord is not "with us" to help us. Love doesn't prevent every problem, but love does stand with us and help

us through every hurt and struggle. When a person suffers in righteousness as Joseph did, he finds the favor of God.

Peter spoke to slaves about suffering unjustly for our faith. He said in 1 Peter 2:18-21, "Servants, be subject to your masters with all respect, not only to the good and gentle but also to the unjust. For this is a gracious thing, when, mindful of God, one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly. For what credit is it if, when you sin and are beaten for it, you endure? But if when you do good and suffer for it you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God. For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps." Jesus is our example of patience while suffering.

Peter continues in 2:22-25, "He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly. He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed. For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls." Jesus didn't get angry or call down legions of angels to take vengeance. Rather He entrusted himself to the Father who judges righteously. We too must learn to put ourselves in God's hands.

Peter said in 1 Peter 4:19, "Therefore let those who suffer according to God's will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good." In times of hurt, we must let God take over in our lives, trusting that He will take care of us and will help us through our struggles. Paul assures us in Romans 8:28, "And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose." God will take all the unfair things that come your way and work them into something good. Not all things are good, but God can cause all things to work together for good in our lives. He may be at work now!

Some pain comes as a result of just living in this imperfect world as imperfect people with other imperfect people. Perhaps the troubles we encounter are not so much God's indifference to us as it is to remind us of our utter need for God. It is the tendency of people to forget God, not the tendency of God to forget people. Our nation is fast moving toward secularism, telling God to leave, telling God to get out of our affairs. This whole movement is a tragic mistake. If we reject God, He will also reject us. If we refuse to acknowledge Him or listen to Him, He will also refuse to listen to our prayers.

Hebrews 12:25 says, "See that you do not refuse him who is speaking [that is, God]. For if they did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, much less will we escape if we reject him who warns from heaven." Could it be that through the calamities of our lives God is telling us all to wake up? Could it be that instead

of punishing us, He is trying to get our attention. If you were God, and they removed prayer and Bible study from schools, began removing your name in as many places as they could, if their lives were filled with greed, with immorality, and with sin, wouldn't you out of love want to point them back to the cross and to truth?

Rather than allow your pain to pull you away from God, let it pull you back to Him! Rather than give up on God, give up on life without God. More than anything else, God wants to be in your life. Jesus said to some apathetic Christians in Revelation 3:20, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me." He wants to have a relationship with you, to be your Lord and your friend. He hasn't moved one bit from the place He has always been. If God seems far from you, it could be that you have pushed Him away by choosing other things over Him. Let Him in your heart.

Love the Lord again, and He will love you. Live for Him and He will bless you. Give your heart to Him and He will give you love and joy and peace. Believe in the Lord Jesus as the Son of God, repent of every sin, confess His name before others, and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins (Acts 2:38). When you are baptized the Lord will wash away every sin, give you the gift of the Holy Spirit, and add you to His church. If you are a Christian who has wandered away from Him, come back to Him today. The Lord loves you so much He sent Jesus to die for you. Love Him and serve Him.

We all face struggles in this life, but one thing is sure. Whatever difficulties, whatever hurts, whatever unfairness, and whatever tragic thing that happens to us here is not all there is to the story. My friend there is more. Paul who suffered so much for his faith in this life from persecution and from cruelty said, "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" (Romans 8:18). Being with God in heaven will be so marvelous and wonderful, that it will make us forget all the unfair pain and hurt of this life. It won't matter there. What will matter is spending an eternity living and loving God.

Paul said later in the chapter (verses 31-35), "What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?" His answer is nothing! Nothing outside of our own refusal to serve Him can ever separate from the love of God. God is so good.

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