

Why God? Our Struggle with Suffering

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GENESIS 21:8-21

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Core Competency:

Personal God - I believe God is involved in and cares about my daily life.

I lift my eyes toward the mountains. Where will my help come from? My help comes from the LORD, the Maker of heaven and earth. (Psalm 121:1-2)

Using This Study

❶ EXAMINE His Word

What does God SAY? The words God uses to communicate matters so pay close attention to the details emphasized or repeated in the passage.

❷ DISCOVER His Word

What does God MEAN? Answer the questions and then bring to your COMMUNITY GROUP to discover and discuss with others.

❸ LIVE His Word

How does this truth FIT? God's word is lived in real life so engage with truth in your LIFE GROUP.

Introduction

In *The Case for Faith*, Lee Strobel records a dialogue between himself and author/philosopher Peter Kreeft:

“How can a mere finite human be sure that infinite wisdom would not tolerate certain short-range evils in order for more long-range good that we cannot foresee?” [Kreeft] asked.

I could see his point but needed an example. “Elaborate a bit,” I prodded.

Dr. Kreeft (a philosophy professor for 38 years) thought a moment. “Look at it this way,” he said. “Imagine a bear in a trap and a hunter who, out of sympathy, wants to liberate him. He tries to win the bear’s confidence, but he can’t do it, so he has to shoot the bear full of drugs. The bear, however, thinks this is an attack and that the hunter is trying to kill him. He doesn’t realize this is being done out of compassion.

“Then, in order to get the bear out of the trap, the hunter has to push him further into the trap to release the tension on the spring. If the bear were semiconscious at that point, he would be even more convinced that the hunter was his enemy out to cause him suffering and pain. But the bear would be wrong because his understanding is too limited.”

Kreeft let the illustration soak in for a moment. “Now,” he concluded, “how can anyone be certain that’s not an analogy between us and God? I believe God does the same to us sometimes, and we can’t comprehend why he does it any more than the bear can understand the motivations of the hunter. As the bear could have trusted the hunter, so we can trust God.

This Week

Suffering is something everyone eventually confronts in this fallen world—including those who belong to God. In spite of our sin and often short-sighted response to our circumstances, God willingly enters our world, patiently working out just the right plan, at just the right time, and in just the right way.

Our challenge is to maintain our confidence in His character and declared agenda and purpose for our life. Namely, bringing glory to Himself in the Person of Jesus Christ.

① EXAMINE His Word

What does God SAY? The words God uses to communicate matters so pay close attention to the details emphasized or repeated in the passage:

Genesis 21:8-21

8 The child [Isaac] grew and was weaned, and Abraham held a great feast on the day Isaac was weaned.

9 But Sarah saw the son mocking —the one Hagar the Egyptian had borne to Abraham.

10 So she said to Abraham, “Drive out this slave with her son, for the son of this slave will not be a coheir with my son Isaac!”

11 Now this was a very difficult thing for Abraham because of his son.

12 But God said to Abraham, “Do not be concerned about the boy and your slave. Whatever Sarah says to you, listen to her, because your offspring will be traced through Isaac.

13 But I will also make a nation of the slave’s son because he is your offspring.”

14 Early in the morning Abraham got up, took bread and a waterskin, put them on Hagar’s shoulders, and sent her and the boy away. She left and wandered

in the Wilderness of Beer-sheba.

15 When the water in the skin was gone, she left the boy under one of the bushes.

16 Then she went and sat down nearby, about a bowshot away, for she said, “I can’t bear to watch the boy die!” So as she sat nearby, she wept loudly.

17 God heard the voice of the boy, and the angel of God called to Hagar from heaven and said to her, “What’s wrong, Hagar? Don’t be afraid, for God has heard the voice of the boy from the place where he is.

18 Get up, help the boy up, and support him, for I will make him a great nation.”

19 Then God opened her eyes, and she saw a well of water. So she went and filled the waterskin and gave the boy a drink.

20 God was with the boy, and he grew; he settled in the wilderness and became an archer.

21 He settled in the Wilderness of Paran, and his mother got a wife for him from the land of Egypt.

② DISCOVER His Word

What does God MEAN? Answer the following questions and then bring to your COMMUNITY GROUP to discover and discuss with others.

1. Abraham experiences this heart-wrenching problem because of his part in a decision made years before. Explain briefly from Genesis 16:1-5 some lasting consequences of that decision.
2. God appears to support Sarah’s wish that Ismael and Hagar be sent away, does this mean God is condoning Sarah’s motives in v. 12? Explain your answer.
3. How are man’s choices and God’s sovereignty seen in vv. 8-13?

4. Consider vv. 14-16 and realize that this is the second time Hagar found herself in a vulnerable circumstance where God showed up (cf. 16:4-7). In light of this event what should Hagar and, by extension—all believers, understand about:
- a) God's character (cf. Deut. 7:7-9; 2 Tim 1:9)?
 - b) God's timing (cf. 1 Peter 1: 5; 5:10)?
 - c) God's calling (cf. Isaiah 42:6; Heb. 9:15)?

Sermon Notes:

③LIVE His Word

How does this truth FIT? God's word is lived in real life so engage with truth in your LIFE GROUP:

What was God's ultimate goal in choosing Isaac and excluding Ishmael from the covenant (12:3)? Was God cruel to exclude Ishmael? Why or why not?

30 CORE Competencies

10 Core Beliefs

Trinity *2 Corinthians 13:14*

I believe the God of the Bible is the only true God - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Salvation by Grace *Ephesians 2:8-9* I believe a person comes into a right relationship with God by His grace, through faith in Jesus Christ.

Authority of the Bible *2 Timothy 3:16-17*

I believe the Bible is the Word of God and has the right to command my belief and action.

Personal God *Psalms 121:1-2*

I believe God is involved in and cares about my daily life.

Identity in Christ *John 1:12*

I believe I am significant because of my position as a child of God.

Church *Ephesians 4:15-16*

I believe the church is God's primary way to accomplish His purposes on earth today.

Humanity *John 3:16*

I believe all people are loved by God and need Jesus Christ as their Savior.

Compassion *Psalms 82:3-4*

I believe God calls all Christians to show compassion to those in need.

Eternity *John 14:1-4*

I believe there is a heaven and a hell and that Jesus Christ is returning to judge the earth and to establish His eternal kingdom.

Stewardship *1 Timothy 6:17-19*

I believe that everything I am or own belongs to God.

Spiritual Gifts *Romans 12:4-6*

I know and use my spiritual gifts to accomplish God's purposes.

Biblical Community *Acts 2:44-47*

I live life with other Christians to accomplish God's purposes in the world.

Giving Away My Time *Colossians 3:17*

I give away my time to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away God's Money *2 Corinthians 8:7*

I give away God's money to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Faith *Ephesians 6:19-20*

I give away my faith to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Life *Romans 12:1*

I give away my life to fulfill God's purposes.

10 Core Virtues

Joy *John 15:11*

I have inner contentment and purpose in spite of my circumstances.

Peace *Philippians 4:6-7*

I am free from anxiety because things are right between God, me, and others.

Faithfulness *Proverbs 3:3-4*

I demonstrate loyalty in my relationships with others in response to God's loyalty to me.

Self-Control *Titus 2:11-13*

I have the power, through Christ, to control myself.

Humility *Philippians 2:3, 4*

I choose to esteem others above myself.

Love *1 John 4:10-12*

I sacrificially and unconditionally love and forgive others.

Patience *Proverbs 14:29*

I endure patiently under the unavoidable pressures of life.

Kindness/Goodness *1 Thess. 5:15*

I choose to do the right things in my relationships with others.

Gentleness *Philippians 4:5*

I am thoughtful, considerate and calm in dealing with others.

Hope *Hebrews 6:19-20*

I can cope with the hardships of life and with death because of the hope I have in Jesus Christ

10 Core Practices

Worship *Psalms 95:1-7*

I worship God for who He is and what He has done for me.

Prayer *Psalms 66:16-20*

I pray to God to know Him, to lay my request before Him and to find direction for my daily life.

Bible Study *Hebrews 4:12*

I read the Bible to know God, the truth, and to find direction for my daily life.

Single-mindedness *Matthew 6:33* I focus on God and His priorities for my life.