

# Session 2: God and Tragedy

The “joy of life” side  
of the coin



Psalm 8:3-9 - A Psalm of David.

When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers,  
the moon and the stars that you have established;  
what are human beings that you are mindful of them,  
mortals that you care for them?  
Yet you have made them a little lower than God,  
and crowned them with glory and honor.  
You have given them dominion over the works of your hands;  
you have put all things under their feet,  
all sheep and oxen,  
and also the beasts of the field,  
the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea,  
whatever passes along the paths of the seas.  
O Lord, our Sovereign,  
how majestic is your name in all the earth!

Songs of praise were often part of David’s life. The Psalms are a great place to spend some time...almost all emotions are expressed there.

The “life is difficult” side  
of the coin



## Reading #1: Orr-Ewing, chap. 1-3

- In Chapter 1 our author places significant emphasis on our being made in the image of God. How is this seem to be true to you? Does this give you a sense of your own value? Does this relate to suffering for you?
- Chapter 2’s topic is anger.
  - Psalm 13:1-2 How long, Lord? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me? How long must I wrestle with my thoughts and day after day have sorrow in my heart? How long will my enemy triumph over me?

- Psalm 10:1-2 Why, Lord, do you stand far off? Why do you hide yourself in times of trouble?
- Psalm 35:17 How long, Lord, will you look on?
- Psalm 44:24 Awake, Lord! Why do you sleep? Rouse yourself!
- Lam 5:20 Why do you always forget us? Why do you forsake us so long?
- Habakkuk 1:1-4 How long, Lord, must I call for help, but you do not listen? Or cry out to you, “Violence!” but you do not save? Why do you make me look at injustice? Why do you tolerate wrongdoing? Destruction and violence are before me; there is strife, and conflict abounds. Therefore, the law is paralyzed, and justice never prevails. The wicked hem in the righteous, so that justice is perverted.
- Question: How comfortable are you with anger in general—even being around it? How about having anger towards God?
- Chapter 3 is about grief.
  - Elisabeth Kübler-Ross - denial, anger, bargaining, depression, acceptance, and after all that—grief. These are the five stages that we may actually experience *before* grief. One person may not experience all of them, and the order may vary.
  - How have you experienced grief in the past? What has the effect of grief on your spiritual life? Were any of her comments particularly helpful to you?

## Reading #2: Why Does God Allow Tragedy and Suffering?

Did some parts of this article appeal to you more than others? What did you like about them?

### **The first point of light: God is not the creator of evil and suffering.**

- Some people think of suffering as a necessary tool God uses to carry out God’s “grand plan”. Others see suffering as originally unnecessary for God’s plan, but once evil entered the world suffering became unavoidable, and God worked with it toward good ends. What is your view?
- God’s sovereignty doesn’t mean that God is the author of everything that happens. There is something that is called God’s permissive will—those things that God does not make to happen, and may even violently oppose—but are being permitted for the time being. It is believed by many that there is some process that God must allow to be played out before evil and suffering is stopped—that all tragedy and suffering is not the “will of God”. Does this make sense to you? Why or why not?
- Note: There is such a thing as fair and just punishment as a consequence for wrongdoing, perhaps to discourage it, but that’s not what we’re talking about here.

## **The second point of light: Though suffering isn't good, God can use it to accomplish good.**

- Romans 8:28 - We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose.
- Does this include things in God's permissive will?
- This verse doesn't include a time line. Honestly speaking, what are your thoughts about God's timing?

## **The third point of light: The day is coming when suffering will cease and God will judge evil.**

- Suffering will cease...later  
The Garden of Eden started off great...no suffering and lots to eat! :)  
Then came the period of suffering that we are in now. Times can be pretty tough.  
Then will come a final, eternal time of well-being and joy.
- God will judge evil  
Romans 2: 4-8 - "Or do you despise the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience? Do you not realize that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance? But by your hard and impenitent heart you are **storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath**, when God's righteous judgment will be revealed. For he will repay according to each one's deeds: to those who by patiently doing good seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life; while for those who are self-seeking and who obey not the truth but wickedness, there will be wrath and fury."  
This judgment doesn't happen right away. Second Peter 3:9 - "The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance."  
• Though these verses don't directly address injustice, feeling like others "get away with it" (like the prophet Habakkuk did) can create a deep desire for perpetrators to face consequences. Powerlessness in the face of injustice is significant suffering and a very common experience. Our country, like most, has a long history of it. Are these verses a comfort to you or scary, or both?

## **The fourth point of light: Our suffering will pale in comparison to the good things God has in store for his followers.**

- Revelation 21 - Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying,  
"See, the home of God is among mortals.  
He will dwell with them;  
they will be his peoples,

and God himself will be with them;  
he will wipe every tear from their eyes.  
Death will be no more;  
mourning and crying and pain will be no more,  
for the first things have passed away.”

And the one who was seated on the throne said, “See, I am making all things new.” Also he said, “Write this, for these words are trustworthy and true.” Then he said to me, “It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give water as a gift from the spring of the water of life. Those who conquer will inherit these things, and I will be their God and they will be my children.

### **Finally, the fifth point of light: We decide whether to turn bitter or turn to God for peace and courage.**

- Hopelessness eventually leads to bitterness
  - Hebrews 12:15 See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God; that no “root of bitterness” springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled;
  - Ephesians 4:31 Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice.
  - Acts 8:23 For I see that you are in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity.”
- How do you get out of bitterness?
  - If hopelessness got you there, maybe hope can get you out...that talking with others to restore your faith, and allowing yourself to get some TLC from those who care.

Thought for the day: No matter how deep the pit, God is deeper still. Corrie ten Boom  
People who have been at some of the **very** worst places in life say that God came through for them. Corrie ten Boom is a good example (Google her), and the subject of this week’s extra reading homework is another. There are innumerable of people of faith who have said the same thing...a “cloud of witnesses”. (Hebrews 11)

## Homework

1. Read chapters 4-6
2. Read the article “ What if love is the real choice?”