

# Session 3: Though suffering isn't good, God can use it to accomplish good.

The “joy of life” side  
of the coin



*Immortal, Invisible, God Only Wise.* Words by Walter Chalmers Smith (1824-1908) a Scottish Free Church minister who served congregations in London, Glasgow and Edinburgh. Hymnologist Albert Bailey says composing poetry was for Smith "the retreat of his nature from the burden of his labors."

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=spE-BE23qxA](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=spE-BE23qxA)

Homework: Send me the names of hymns that bring you joy, and I will compile them as a handout for our last session together. Also, separately include activities that cheer you up... such as writing poetry, cooking a favorite dish, watching a certain movie. I'll add some too.

The “life is difficult” side  
of the coin



Chapter 4: Sickness - “According to the Bible our general human experience of disease is unaffected by our specific moral behaviour and even by our belief system.”

- Our author ultimately does not answer the “why” of physical pain and sickness in terms of God’s intentions for allowing it. She simply says that we are not alone in it, and that God has experienced it also. Do you agree?
- I have been tempted to say that the part of suffering that God limits and we cannot prevent despite our good and important efforts—even with its intensity—must be very important during this present age, despite it not bringing pleasure to God or being a part of God’s plan for either Eden or eternity, simply because God has allowed so much of it. What are your thoughts?

Chapter 5: Mental Illness

- In all sorts of ways emotional and behavioral problems have to do with loss of self control, while people around you will typically be telling you to get control of yourself. Whether it’s depression, addiction, anxiety, or mania—psychological problems are tough. Some of it is genetic, and some is from traumatic experiences.

- *What do you need from God and others when mental illness strikes you or someone you love?*

## Chapter 6: Violence

- As our author said in this chapter, when one experiences significant, deliberate violence they typically have come face to face with evil. And that brings up two additional topics beyond the big one of evil: justice and forgiveness. Both evil and forgiveness are huge topics and easily deserve significant time to discuss, so we're not going to have time to discuss them here.
- However, given what the Bible has to say about God and justice, what are your expectations from God about justice? How do you pray during times of injustice?

## How God uses suffering to accomplish good

Romans 8:28 And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.

### **Suffering:**

#### **1. Gets our attention**

- Causes us to focus on what's important, including our relationship with God
  - C. S. Lewis, in *The Problem of Pain*, writes, "We can ignore even pleasure. But pain insists upon being attended to. God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pains: it is his megaphone to rouse a deaf world."

#### **2. Promotes growth**

- Causes us to mature
  - James 1:2-4 "Consider it all joy, my brothers and sisters, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing."
- Suffering will give us gifts if we work with it
  - Will take us "places" we would have never gone otherwise, and meet people and have experiences we would have never had

#### **3. Causes us to clean up our lives—and keep them clean**

- Corrects behaviors—God's discipline
  - Ps 119:67 "Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I keep Your word."
  - Hebrews 12:7 "It is for discipline that you endure; God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom his father does not discipline?"

- Maintain humility - Paul's thorn in flesh
  - II Corinthians 12:7-9 "Because of the extraordinary greatness of the revelations, for this reason, to keep me from exalting myself, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment me—to keep me from exalting myself! Concerning this I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might leave me. And He has said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness.'"

#### **4. Gives us an opportunity to serve others**

- Suffer so that others don't have to
- Participating in the sufferings of Jesus, and for the Gospel
  - 1 Peter 4:12-13 "Dear friends, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that has come on you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice inasmuch as you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed."
  - Romans 8: 17-18 "Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heir of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory. I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us."

#### **5. Shows the glory of God to encourage our belief and others'**

- Miracles happen like the blind man who was healed to show the glory of God
  - John 9:1-3 "As he went along, he saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked him, 'Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?' 'Neither this man nor his parents sinned,' said Jesus, 'but this happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him.'"
- Also, as others observe us during times of illness, whether we're healed or maintain our character in the midst of suffering, they see our faith, our hope, and our love and often wished they had as much for themselves.

Ultimately there is "holy mystery" around suffering we will never understand

- There are likely multiple purposes and reasons at any one time
- As the saying goes, "I don't know what my future holds, but I know Who holds my future." This goes back to our very first premise...that God is essentially our parent.

# Homework

1. Read chapters 7-Conclusion
2. Read AA Slogans
3. View “For your mirror” and use it if you wish
4. Send me the names of hymns that bring you joy, and I will compile them as a handout for our last session together. Also, separately include activities that cheer you up...such as writing poetry, cooking a favorite dish (tell us which one), or watching a certain movie. They will be included.