

Evil and Suffering

Scripture used: Job 1:12-21 and 2:5-6 (NLT)

OVERVIEW

Big Idea:

As our scripture relates Job's numerous and dreadful misfortunes, the key concept is God's ability to redeem even unearned suffering. In other words, the kind of suffering that strikes people who don't deserve it. Pastor Hurmon also quoted from the work of social scientist Jonathan Haidt. A close friend of Professor Haidt was undergoing terrible suffering but, when pitied, stated "This is my time to sing the aria", by which he meant the portion of the opera when a soloist is singing a song of sorrow but transforms it into something powerfully beautiful and elegiac. And like the soloist singing the aria, Jesus helps each of us find a way to suffer while still praising God for His love, grace, and blessings.

KEY POINTS

- 1) **Evil is loose in the world.** God is creator and redeemer. Job is an innocent man who exemplifies unearned suffering. Satan is evil. Job accuses God of unjustly harming him; the people accuse Job of doing wrong to cause his misfortunes. However, both Job and the people miss the true reality that the presence of evil in the world is the source of Job's struggles. It's easy to forget about the thief, who is "roaming throughout the earth" in Job 1:7 (NIV).
- 2) **God is powerful enough to engage with evil and bend it to His purpose.** Sometimes suffering leads to more fear, and a sort of impairment from our suffering ("post-traumatic stress"). Sometimes it leads to "post-traumatic growth": endurance, character, resilience, and strengthened relationships. Paul describes all of these benefits to suffering in Romans 5:3-4 (NLT). Our cries for help to be delivered from suffering in the present can cause us to miss out on the moment we're in. The church is our sanctuary and our community that help us navigate the trials and tribulations.
- 3) **Suffering brings about a radical change in our priorities and perspectives.** When the blessings are absent, do we still have the heart to love God? God permits the existence of evil. He does not wipe it out, and as John 10:10 (NIV) point out, we should probably be grateful for that. We may be wiped out too! Instead of wiping out evil, God recognizes the work of the enemy and redeems it. Evil is experienced on every level of life, and eventually, it is inevitable that we will encounter suffering, because "naked we came from our mother's womb, and naked we will depart." The loss of things we value and find security in will be an experience of suffering. But through our growth from suffering, He can help us to trust Him even when blessings are absent. When we learn to trust God in the midst of suffering, we will experience the power of God who always has the last word, even in the face of loss and death.

DISCUSSION

- 1) **HEAR** - How do you typically relate to suffering? In past experiences of suffering, do you see more signs of post-traumatic stress or post-traumatic growth? Share and reflect with others in your group.
- 2) **UNDERSTAND** - What are the factors that allow us to experience growth in the midst of suffering? How can our relationship with God make a practical difference when we suffer? Consider the range of reactions that are common during suffering (avoidance of suffering, anger, unhealthy coping or escapism, prayer, asking for help from others, worship, etc.) What is our personal tendency? How is God challenging us to grow?
- 3) **DO** - If you are in the midst of suffering, consider one or two ways to "lean in" toward God and ask God for the strength to engage with our suffering in a way that leads to growth and deeper trust in our God who has the last word. If you are not presently in a season of suffering, consider how God might be calling you to prepare for what life will inevitably bring? How can you strengthen your relationship with God now? How could God use you to support others who are going through a difficult time?