

Sermon Series: When Life Gets Hard: Big Questions About Pain and Suffering

To be used with: Session 3: Why Am I Suffering?

Sermon Title Possibilities:

Scripture: Job 11:13-16; 23:8-12; John 9:1-3

Connection with Unit Theme: To complement the small group study *When Life Gets Hard*, these sermon outlines will use the same Scripture passages as the small group study, so the pastor can reinforce the study from the pulpit.

The Point: Don't assume your suffering is the direct result of sin in your life.

Introduction: When I was in college, I took a course in philosophy. One of the textbooks for that class was *Man's Search for Meaning*, by Victor Frankl. He was a psychiatrist who lived in Austria during World War II, when his country was under Nazi occupation. Since he was Jewish, he was eventually sent to a concentration camp. The book details his experiences and his reflections during this time of persecution. He managed to survive the Holocaust, but most of his family did not. Our professor used that book to raise some important philosophical questions. For instance, why is there so much evil and suffering in the world? Why do so many innocent people suffer?

As a pastor, I have pondered those questions for many years, and I still don't know all the answers. The book of Job is perhaps the oldest book in the Bible, and it deals with those very questions. Job suffered more hardship in a single day than most people have faced in a lifetime. On top of that, he was stricken with boils that caused him physical misery. The most puzzling thing is, Job was a righteous man! Why would God let a good man go through that kind of suffering? Job's friends believed he had sinned, and they tried to get him to confess. Unfortunately, this way of thinking persisted among Jews even during the time of Jesus. When His disciples saw a blind man, they automatically assumed either he or his parents had sinned. Is hardship always the direct result of sin? What does the Bible say about this subject?

- I. **A false presumption.** (Job 11:13-16)
 - A. This section is part of a conversation between Job and Zophar.
 1. Job had experienced one calamity after another.
 - a. His livestock was stolen or destroyed.
 - b. All ten of his children were killed that same day.
 - c. Some time later, he was stricken with boils from head to toe.
 2. Like the rest of Job's friends, Zophar thought Job was being punished.
 - a. "Stretch out thine hands" – This was often a sign of repentance.
 - b. He believed if Job simply repented of what he had done wrong, then his suffering would end.
 - B. Does God use suffering as punishment?
 1. Some people insist God would never punish us with hardship, but His Word says otherwise.

- a. He sent several plagues and hardships on the Israelites when they rebelled against Him in the wilderness.
 - b. He sent drought on them because of their idolatry (1 Kings 17:1).
 - c. When they persisted in their rebellion, He allowed foreign enemies to destroy their kingdom.
2. On the other hand, it's a mistake to think suffering and hardship are always the result of sin.
 - a. God's prophets suffered hardship because of their uncompromising devotion to God.
 - b. Jesus warned His followers that they would have tribulation in this world (John 16:33).

II. **A faithful proclamation.** (Job 23:8-12)

- A. Job affirmed his faith in God in spite of his suffering.
 1. He complained that God seemed to be hiding Himself.
 - a. He did not understand why God allowed all these bad things to happen to him, or how God could be glorified through them.
 - b. When you're going through trials, it's natural to wonder if God has abandoned you.
 - Someone has wisely said, "If you get mad at God, He's big enough to handle it."
 2. He obeyed God even though he did not understand.
 - a. A lesser man might have decided serving God was not worth it.
 - b. He loved God's words more than the food on his plate.
- B. Even in the darkest times, God is still with you.
 1. He is with you even when you do not "feel" His presence.
 - a. Emotions can be very deceptive.
 - b. The devil knows how to manipulate your emotions.
 2. Keep trusting Him even when you don't understand.
 - a. Read His Word daily.
 - God's Word is very precious during times of hardship and doubt.
 - b. Keep praying.
 - Confess your doubts and fears to Him. He knows your heart, so you might as well be honest with Him!

III. **A fresh perspective.** (John 9:1-3)

- A. Jesus and His disciples saw a man who was blind from birth.
 1. The disciples asked whose sins caused the man's blindness.
 - a. Jewish tradition held that babies could sin even while they were in the womb (Genesis 25:21-23; Psalm 58:3).
 - b. Since the man was born blind, the disciples assumed it was either because of his sins, or his parents'.
 - It is true that children are born with a sinful nature, but we must be careful about blaming them for their own physical disabilities. God is often glorified through disabilities. Evangelist David Ring has said he would not trade his cerebral palsy for anything. He says he gets people's attention the minute he opens his mouth!

2. Jesus replied that the man was born blind so God's works could be revealed through him.
 - a. Jesus healed him of his blindness, and no one could deny that he had been healed (vv. 8 – 25).
 - b. By healing him, Jesus proved He was really from God.
 - We must be balanced on the issue of healing. On the one hand, God still does miracles.¹ On the other hand, God does not always choose to heal. Adrian Rogers once told of a discussion he had with a prominent TV evangelist on the subject. Dr. Rogers told him, "When you stand in your pulpit and proclaim it's always God's will for people to be healed, that's not only wrong, it's one of the cruelest things you can tell a person."
- B. How can God be glorified through your suffering?
 1. He teaches you to depend on Him rather than your own strength.
 2. He teaches you that His grace is sufficient (2 Cor. 12:7-10).
 3. He can use you to encourage people who are going through the same kind of hardships.

Conclusion: I attended the Southern Baptist Convention Pastors' Conference in 2014, and one of the speakers that year was Rick Warren. His son had recently committed suicide, and he told how that had affected him and his family. He called it the worst day of his life, and I'm sure it was. He also made a comment that I thought was rather profound: "God does not always give us the answers, and even if He did, it probably wouldn't make us feel any better." He was right. Even when we know the reasons, it does not usually ease the pain. All we can do is trust God. Charles Stanley has well said, "I don't know what kind of burden you're under, but I know who's under there with you." God is with you in all things, and He can use your suffering for His own glory.

¹ One of the best testimonies I've ever read is *These Blind Eyes Now See*, by Marolyn Ford. She tells how God miraculously healed her of blindness. If you can find it, I would also encourage you to listen to the testimony of Jimmy Blackwood, son of the famous gospel singer James Blackwood. He tells of how God healed him of pancreatic cancer.

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