**God, Us, and Suffering**

**Introduction**

1. The anniversary of 9/11/01 – when the World Trade Centers in New York City were attacked – reminds us of the evil that is in the world that often leads to suffering.
   1. This was not the first time such evil manifested itself, nor the last time (**cf. Ecclesiastes 1:9**).
   2. Evil continues in various forms.
   3. We also see bad things happening to good people every day – in various forms: sickness, accidents, misfortune, etc. (*Even when these things are not directly linked to another’s evil ways.*)
2. The question of suffering has long been pondered by men throughout the ages.
   1. It is a question which even the righteous – those serving God, Christians – have struggled to answer, and understand. (Example: Job)
   2. **It is a primary subject used by skeptics to disprove God’s existence.**
   3. **It has also caused many to lose their faith – *as they fail to understand how God could allow such to happen, and fail to understand how to react when inflicted with suffering themselves*.**
3. While we aren’t given all the answers we might desire concerning this subject, God has given us as much information as we need.
   1. The existence of suffering, although thought by many, cannot be used to disprove God’s existence.
   2. Suffering is a necessary consequence of free-will.
   3. Christians are not exempt from suffering, as they live in the same imperfect world as the rest of mankind.
      1. **Christians must not allow suffering to cause their faith to waiver.**
      2. **God has given us instruction concerning the proper reaction to suffering.**
4. Suffering, God, and Mankind.
5. God’s Creation – Good
   1. **Genesis 1:31** – God’s creation was good. It was as He intended it to be – no flaw in the carrying out of His plan.
      1. **Some suggest that if suffering and evil exist, it must exist because God created it that way – thus, if God is supposed to be wholly good, the existence of suffering and evil prove He does not exist.**
      2. **James 1:16-17** – The existence of suffering and evil does not imply its origin is God. (God is good, and good comes from Him.)
      3. **If one is to put God to the test in the scope of suffering and evil – in order to disprove that He exists – he must appeal to God’s word for His true identity.**
         1. **God never denied the existence of suffering and evil**.
         2. **He also never made the claim that His immutable good nature would necessitate the eradication of suffering and evil.**
6. Man – Free-Will
   1. **Genesis 2:15-17 –** God created man, and gave Him a command.
      1. The giving of the command implies the possibility of breaking the command.
      2. Yet, God would not give a command that could not be followed.
      3. Thus, in this command, and all commands, is the evidence of man being created with free-will.
      4. **With free-will comes consequences to our choices** – many of which God informs us of – ***“you shall surely die.” (Whether good or bad.)***
   2. **Genesis 3:6** – by use of their free-will, man chose to disobey God.
      1. **3:17-19, 22-24** – suffering ultimately resulted from sinning.
      2. *The ground was cursed, and man was expelled from the garden – thus losing access to the tree of life – meaning physical death became the norm* (**cf. 1 Corinthians 15:20-22**).
   3. **Ecclesiastes 7:29** – God created good, and man in free-will did not submit to God’s will – thus, the existence of suffering.
      1. **What some do not understand is the fact that if God erased suffering, He would have to erase free-will.**
      2. ***Some choose not to love God, thus do not submit to His will, and other’s suffer because of this. (cf. 2 Peter 2:7-8 –*** *Righteous Lot oppressed by filthy conduct of wicked.****)***
      3. ***James 1:13-15 – This is not God’s fault. God cannot tempt us to do evil.***
7. God’s Creation – Natural Laws
   1. Other than the fact that all suffering finds its origin in Adam’s sin – suffering physical death, which comes from many things – not all suffering is a result of an individual’s specific sin.
   2. **In other words, some things just happen.**
   3. **Ecclesiastes 9:11-12** – Time and chance result in suffering.
      1. There are natural laws in God’s creation. *(Ex: Gravity.)*
      2. **When those laws are broken, even if by chance, or accident, suffering may result on different levels.**
8. **Not all questions are able to be answered concerning the topic of suffering. Yet we know suffering exists. *The better question to ask is: because suffering exists, how should I react to it, and what can be made of suffering?***
   1. This is especially the case with Christians.
   2. We, as children of God, must understand the reaction God wants us to have to suffering, and must understand the good that can come from it. 🡪
9. Suffering and Christians.

*Suffering exists. How are we, as Christians, supposed to meet suffering, and what can be made of suffering in our lives?*

1. Gained Perspective
   1. **If the physical life were the pinnacle of existence, God would not allow such pervasive suffering to occur. If this life was “it,” it would be pretty sad.**
      1. **Revelation 7:16-17 –** of those who had their robes washed in the blood of the lamb.
      2. ***Suffering should allow us to focus on the eternal time after this life, where there is the option of no suffering.***
   2. **2 Corinthians 4:16-18** – In their suffering, the apostles did not lose faith because it reminded them that this life is not all there is. They were working for something greater, and lasting.
   3. ***“you do not know what will happen tomorrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away” (James 4:14)***.
      1. Suffering can remind us that this life is not indestructible, and immortal.
      2. This life is fragile, and short.
      3. **We should think about eternity!**
   4. **God allows suffering to occur, and in His providence, uses it to mold His children – we should recognize this. 🡪**
2. Growth in Christ
   1. Allows us to prove ourselves.
      1. **Job 1:1, 9-11, 22** – The Devil thought Job only feared God so he would receive blessings from God.
         1. What would happen when those things were taken away? When Job suffered?
         2. **Job was able to prove his love for God, and by it came out stronger. 🡪**
   2. Produces Endurance (For other trials, and the general endurance needed to get to heaven.)
      1. **James 1:2-4, 12** – Suffering tries us, and allows us to grow in patience. (or endurance)
      2. **2 Corinthians 12:7-10** – (Paul’s thorn in flesh.) it promotes dependence upon God.
         1. NOTE: this thorn in his flesh was ***“a messenger of Satan.”*** (Came from the Devil, not God.)
         2. **James 1:5-7** – If we lack wisdom needed to get through suffering we must turn to God. (**Which also promotes a growth in faith!**)
   3. Yields Fruit of Righteousness (God uses suffering for discipline.)
      1. **Hebrews 12:3-11** – God allows suffering because He loves us. He wishes us to grow (In ways previously discussed.)
      2. **(v. 12-13)** – We must recognize the learning we can gain from suffering, and allow it to yield fruit in our lives, instead of allowing it to break us.
3. Christians Will Suffer (How will we deal with it is the question.)
   1. **2 Timothy 3:12** – If we want to live for Jesus we will experience suffering.
   2. **Acts 14:22** – (After Paul was stoned and left for dead.) Tribulation is necessary to enter heaven.

**Conclusion**

1. Suffering is not God’s fault. It is ultimately a result of man’s foolishness in sin. It is a part of life.
2. However, God uses it for our advantage. We must recognize this, and act accordingly.