


Trusting God Through Trials, Suffering & Evil

Part 2: How Can God be Good When Bad People Prosper?

TALKINGPOINTS WALKINGPOINTS

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Talk together about the glory of God's kingdom. –Psalm 145:11

Love the Lord your God and **walk** in all his ways. –Joshua 22:5

Triangle Community Church aims to be a “transforming church”. We exist to be used by God as He transforms ordinary people into extraordinary followers of Jesus Christ. TCC believes not only that life-change is possible—but that it is to be expected. Growth is God's will for his people. But transformation does not happen by accident. It requires intentional, intelligent action. 1 Timothy 4:7 instructs you to “discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness.” Since “Talking Points, Walking Points” is intended both for individual reflection and for group discussion, questions vary in degree of vulnerability required. Generally it is best to begin group discussions with questions which involve less personal disclosure—but don't linger there. Be sure to “dive deep” too! The questions which require the greatest openness and honesty,

Questions for Reflection & Discussion

- What are some typical questions people ask regarding apparent injustices in this world?

What are some answers you've heard? Did they satisfy? Why or why not?

- Read Psalm 73. **Why** are we tempted to envy the wicked (v. 3)?

But “when we perceive their end” (v. 17) we no longer envy them! What does this tell us about **our** perspective?

- Read Psalm 73:16-17. What do you think might have happened if Asaph **didn't** go into God's sanctuary?

Have you ever “boycotted” church or Bible reading because you were peeved at God? Tell us about it.

- Read Psalm 73:25-28. By this time Asaph “desired nothing on earth” but God. **How** did he get there? Previously, what did he desire on earth (v. 3ff)?

What does it mean that Asaph “made the Lord his refuge” (v. 28)?

How do we do that? Have you done it?

- Compare Psalm 73:1 & 28a. In v. 1, “God is good...” and in v. 28 “the nearness of God is my good.” What is the connection between these two verses? How do we make sure this experience is ours?

Sermon Summary Key Text: Psalm 73

Several years ago I was standing in the TCC parking lot when a motorcyclist was killed. I was the first person to the body. His family had no faith, but now they had to prepare for a funeral, so they asked if I would officiate. One of the dead man's friends asked me, "Pastor, where was God when my friend was hit?" I paused, knowing that this question was difficult to answer in a way that he could hear it. When I said, "God was right there," he blurted out, "Well then, God can go to hell!" His response highlights the sense of injustice we feel when God doesn't run the Universe the way we think He should.

A godly man named Asaph struggled with this—and he nearly walked away from his faith (Psalm 73). Why was Asaph so honest, so vulnerable, in telling us his story? God preserved Asaph's story for us so that we could learn from his experience and not make his mistake. There are many causes of spiritual defection: One of the most lethal is a preoccupation with how God deals with others. From Asaph's experience we learn that comparison is deadly to your spiritual life. We become envious, we doubt God's goodness. What's really troublesome is when God seems to be blessing those who, from our perspective, don't deserve it. That was Asaph's problem. They were breaking all the rules and seem to get away with it! Not only were they getting away with it, they were prospering because of it (v. 5, 12).

Of whom are you envious? Specifically of people who break all the rules and seem to profit from it? Be careful. We are on a slippery slope when we begin to question God's dealings with those around us. Comparison leads to envy, and envy to spiritual defection (v. 15). How we handle our doubt is critical. That is why Asaph's experience is so valuable (v. 16-20). It was in church that Asaph gained the perspective he needed to personally embrace God's justice and God's goodness. Asaph learned that there is a payday someday. God will judge the wicked. Justice will be served. They are not getting away with something. Our problem is that we think in terms of this life only. Asaph experienced a personal spiritual revival which helped him put things into their proper perspective (v. 25-26). When our eyes are fixed on God and we are experiencing the joy of fellowship with him, we are not as easily tempted to compare ourselves with our neighbor (v. 28).



Jesus said, "Truly I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child will not enter it at all."

(Luke 18:17)

To doubt is distrust, to question, to withhold confidence.

Children generally trust—they believed you when you told them of Santa, of the Easter Bunny, of where babies come from...

What are you doing to strengthen, to reward, their trust...

...in you?

...in God?



Psalm 73

¹ Surely God is good to Israel, to those who are pure in heart! ² But as for me, my feet came close to stumbling, my steps had almost slipped. ³ For I was envious of the arrogant as I saw the prosperity of the wicked. ⁴ For there are no pains in their death, and their body is fat. ⁵ They are not in trouble as other men, nor are they plagued like mankind. ⁶ Therefore pride is their necklace; the garment of violence covers them. ⁷ Their eye bulges from fatness; the imaginations of their heart run riot. ⁸ They mock and wickedly speak of oppression; they speak from on high. ⁹ They have set their mouth against the heavens, and their tongue parades through the earth.

¹⁰ Therefore his people return to this place, and waters of abundance are drunk by them. ¹¹ They say, "How does God know? And is there knowledge with the Most High?" ¹² Behold, these are the wicked; and always at ease, they have increased in wealth. ¹³ Surely in vain I have kept my heart pure and washed my hands in innocence; ¹⁴ For I have been stricken all day long and chastened every morning.

¹⁵ If I had said, "I will speak thus," behold, I would have betrayed the generation of Your children. ¹⁶ When I pondered to understand this, it was troublesome in my sight ¹⁷ Until I came into the sanctuary of God; then I perceived their end. ¹⁸ Surely You set them in slippery places; You cast them down to destruction. ¹⁹ How they are destroyed in a moment! They are utterly swept away by sudden terrors! ²⁰ Like a dream when one awakes, O Lord, when aroused, You will despise their form.

²¹ When my heart was embittered and I was pierced within, ²² then I was senseless and ignorant; I was like a beast before You. ²³ Nevertheless I am continually with You; You have taken hold of my right hand. ²⁴ With Your counsel You will guide me, and afterward receive me to glory.

²⁵ Whom have I in heaven but You? And besides You, I desire nothing on earth. ²⁶ My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever. ²⁷ For, behold, those who are far from You will perish; You have destroyed all those who are unfaithful to You. ²⁸ But as for me, the nearness of God is my good; I have made the Lord GOD my refuge, that I may tell of all Your works.

The Apostle Paul suffered “greatly”—greatly in amount and greatly in attitude. Let’s learn from him.

Monday—Read 2 Corinthians 11:23-27

- In v. 23, how does Paul summarize his suffering?
- Specifically, how did Paul suffer? v. 24 _____
v. 25 _____
v. 26 _____
v. 27 _____
- How did Paul respond?
- How do you think you would have responded if you’d suffered the same way?.

Tuesday—Read Philippians 1:12-26

- According to v. 13, where is Paul?
- If you were in a Roman prison, what would concern you?
According to v. 12, what concerned Paul?
- What did Paul do (v. 18)?
According to v. 20b, what was Paul’s great concern?
- What do you think Paul means by v. 21?
- What two opportunities “pressed hard” on Paul (v. 23)?

Wednesday—Read 2 Corinthians 12:7-10

- According to v. 7, what was the divine purpose behind Paul’s adversity?
- Did God scold Paul for asking “why?”
In fact, God was glad to give Paul the reason why—apparently even without Paul asking. God may not answer our question **in the way** we wish, but the Bible teaches us to pray about everything which concerns us and to cast all our cares upon God.
- From today’s study, what do you learn about suffering?

Thursday—Read 2 Corinthians 12:7-10

- According to v. 8, God may—or may not—choose to reveal the purpose for our adversity.
Note that God didn’t answer the “why” question for Paul until quite late in this experience because Paul didn’t even ask “why”. Paul simply asked for relief!
- Did God scold Paul for requesting relief?
God expects us to ask Him for relief. He’s our father, and knows what we’re made of. It was only in the process of asking for relief that Paul got an answer as to why he was suffering (v. 8-9a).
- From today’s study, what do you learn about suffering?

Friday—Read 2 Corinthians 12:7-10

- According to v. 9, did God remove Paul’s adversity? Why or why not?
- According to v. 7, who was the messenger who tormented Paul?
Was it Satan’s desire that Paul stay humble? Who does appreciate humility?
Satan was the agent who inflicted Paul with his “thorn in the flesh”, but God intended that experience as a gift to Paul and an answer to Paul’s most fervent prayer—that he “finish well” the mission God gave him. (Satan was the agent in Job’s experience too, but the pain was filtered through God’s loving hands! Our God is sovereign.)
- Paul’s greatest fear in life is that he would be “disqualified” for ministry (1 Cor. 9:24-27). Pride is one of the biggest disqualifiers in ministry—“God is opposed to the proud.” The result of Paul’s “thorn in the flesh” was that Paul remained humble in the face of the marvelous revelations he’d received. It was a gift from God!
- From today’s study, what do you learn about suffering?

Saturday—Read 2 Corinthians 12:7-10

- In v. 9, what did God tell Paul about his grace?
Did Paul find this comforting (v. 10)?
Read 2 Corinthians 1:3-5. What does God want to do for you in your suffering?
- According to v. 10, what is the relationship between contentment and circumstances?
If your highest goal were to honor Christ, what would it do for your experience of suffering?
- According to v. 10, as long as Paul’s suffering was “for _____ sake”, he was content.
- From today’s study, what do you learn about suffering?