

IS SUFFERING REALLY A PROBLEM?

I. Avenues of suffering.

- A. In reality there are three avenues through which suffering afflicts us.
- B. The first avenue is sin itself and its effects on the physical world.
 - 1. When sin entered the world, God had no choice but to curse it.
 - 2. God could not reward sin, that would go against His nature.
 - 3. Because of the sin of the first two inhabitants of earth, we suffer from disease and the aging process.
 - 4. The world changed after the flood and now we have earthquakes, floods, hurricanes, tornadoes, and all the natural calamities that strike this world.
- C. The second avenue is the sin of others.
 - 1. We suffer at the hands of evildoers.
 - 2. The murderer who opened fire in a movie theater in Louisiana caused people to suffer.
 - 3. Terrorists, those that seek power by any means, and ruthless people with no regard for life cause suffering everyday.
 - 4. Drunk drivers cause others to suffer every week, if not every day.
 - 5. The giving in to lust by a spouse causes families to be destroyed that are totally innocent.
- D. The third avenue is our own sins.
 - 1. We all do stupid things that are wrong.
 - 2. All have sinned and come short of God's glory (Romans 3:23).
 - 3. Most of the emotional scars we carry today are from our own sins.
- E. None of these come from God.
 - 1. They come from the fact that God has allowed man free will in order to come to love God.
 - 2. Without free will, it would not be true love for God, it would be forced service.
 - 3. A consequence of free will is that we often choose sin instead of God.
- F. James 1:17.
- G. God desired for us the world we read of in Genesis 1-2.
- H. Sadly, man lost that and we now live in a world stained and damaged by sin.

II. The value of suffering.

- A. Even an atheist can see value in some types of suffering.
- B. We need to remember that just because we may not see the value in it, does not mean there is none.
 - 1. We are finite and cannot see the big picture.
 - 2. We may not realize any good or value, but that doesn't mean there isn't any.
- C. It is a reminder of our frailty.
 - 1. When we suffer, it focuses our attention on our own weaknesses.
 - 2. I talked with Patrick Morrison Thursday.
 - a. He had a stroke nearly a year ago and is still dealing with the physical results of it and always will.
 - b. He mentioned several times how much we take for granted about our health and how this has opened his eyes to how frail we

are.

3.Pain and suffering can be humbling and can allow us to see more in this world than we have before.

D.It is a reason to turn to God.

1.When we are hurting and are looking for help, we often look to a source higher than ourselves.

2.The God of all comfort is waiting for us (2 Corinthians 1:3).

3.We may all know someone who had turned away from God at some point and gone back into the world who had some physical ailment that caused him or her to come back.

4.Some who have never known God begin to look for Him when disease strikes them or a loved one.

5.Suffering can get our attention (Psalm 18:6).

E.It allows us to see sin for what it really is.

1.The earth has been effected by sin (Romans 5:12).

2.When we suffer, we are reminded of how bad sin is.

3.It should cause us to turn from it and seek forgiveness for any of our sins and strive to never turn back to them.

F.It allows us to see the worth of things.

1.There is a song by Tim McGraw entitled, "Live Like You Are Dying".

a.It is about a man who had a terrible diagnosis from the doctor.

b.He realized how he had been living was not good and he realized the worth of actions and the people around him.

2.When we go through the crucibles of life, we often bring out of them a greater appreciation for the truly important things of life.

3.A poet wrote, "We, by our sufferings, learn to prize our bliss".

G.Suffering prepares us to be compassionate toward others.

1.Hebrews 2:18.

2.Having suffered opens up our hearts to those who are presently suffering.

3.Those that have come back from war often seek others who have been through war because there is a commonality of experience there.

4.Because we know how suffering feels, we should seek to aid others.

H.It allows us to see this world is not our home.

1.This is exactly what Peter pointed out to Christians who were being persecuted (1 Peter 2:11).

2.Hebrews 11:13-16.

3.Romans 8:18.

4.We shouldn't want to stay here and suffering helps remind us of that fact.

I.It allows us to pray better.

1.Effective prayer is a learned attribute.

2.Suffering turns us to prayer and causes us to seek an intensity in that prayer that is not learned until the fires of life touch us.

J.It allows us preparation for eternity.

1.1 Peter 1:6-7.

2.Precious metals are sent through great heat in order to purify them.

3.Life's trial in general and suffering for Jesus in particular build strength.

4.James 1:3.

K.Last, it allows our true character to show.

1. Jesus spoke of those who obey the gospel and are faithful until tribulation and persecution come and then they wither (Matthew 13:20-21).
2. Suffering and persecution separate the wheat from the chaff.
3. Those that can't stand it do all they can to avoid it.
4. Those who grow stronger learn how to deal with it and look towards heaven.

Much of this material came from articles by Wayne Jackson and Dave Miller