

## Suffering 101

*Opening Prayer:* O God, we believe and live by your Word when you allow suffering and pain instead of sunshine and gladness. If you take away, by your Holy Spirit empower us to still bless your holy name. For it is the weak and humble who receive your love, who are pardoned and healed, who are enlightened and strengthened. And so we will find joy in suffering and pray for your will to be done. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.

*Topic for Sharing/Ice Breaker:* Describe a time you thought something was going to be really bad when it turned out really good.

*Question 1:* What do we learn from Job 3?

*Question 2:* What do we learn about Job's friends in chapters 3–8?

Let's explore more deeply how Satan and the friends view suffering. Read Job 1:9–11; 2:4–5 to look at Satan's position and Job 4:7–9; 5:11–16; 8; 11; 15; 18; 20 for the friend's understanding.

*Question 4:* How do Satan and the friends understand pain and suffering?

### **Satan's view --**

**Job 1:9-11 ESV** Then Satan answered the LORD and said, "Does Job fear God for no reason? <sup>10</sup> Have you not put a hedge around him and his house and all that he has, on every side? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land. <sup>11</sup> But stretch out your hand and touch all that he has, and he will curse you to your face."

**Job 2:4-5 ESV** Then Satan answered the LORD and said, "Skin for skin! All that a man has he will give for his life. <sup>5</sup> But stretch out your hand and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will curse you to your face."

**Job's friends' view --**

**Job 4:7-9 ESV** "Remember: who that was innocent ever perished? Or where were the upright cut off? <sup>8</sup> As I have seen, those who plow iniquity and sow trouble reap the same. <sup>9</sup> By the breath of God they perish, and by the blast of his anger they are consumed.

**Job 5:11-16 ESV** he sets on high those who are lowly, and those who mourn are lifted to safety. <sup>12</sup> He frustrates the devices of the crafty, so that their hands achieve no success. <sup>13</sup> He catches the wise in their own craftiness, and the schemes of the wily are brought to a quick end. <sup>14</sup> They meet with darkness in the daytime and grope at noonday as in the night. <sup>15</sup> But he saves the needy from the sword of their mouth and from the hand of the mighty. <sup>16</sup> So the poor have hope, and injustice shuts her mouth.

**Job 8:3-7 ESV** Does God pervert justice? Or does the Almighty pervert the right? <sup>4</sup> If your children have sinned against him, he has delivered them into the hand of their transgression. <sup>5</sup> If you will seek God and plead with the Almighty for mercy, <sup>6</sup> if you are pure and upright, surely then he will rouse himself for you and restore your rightful habitation. <sup>7</sup> And though your beginning was small, your latter days will be very great.

**Job 8:20 ESV** "Behold, God will not reject a blameless man, nor take the hand of evildoers.

*Question 5:* Henri Nouwen writes, "The beginning of healing is in the solidarity of the pain" (*Reaching Out* [New York: Doubleday, 1975], 43). How do Job's friends fail at this? What can you learn from their failures?

*Question 6:* If Satan and the friends don't understand suffering correctly, then what is the right way to interpret tough times?

*Question 7:* Can you a time when suffering is caused by sin and the Law?

*Question 8:* When might suffering do something good for us?

*Question 9:* How do we sometimes suffer for our faith?

*Question 10:* The friends accuse Job of blasphemy for saying that he is a righteous sufferer. Non-Christians sometimes conclude that God is evil since his children suffer. How would you respond to such attacks?

*Question 11:* Discuss these words of C.S. Lewis as he grieved the death of his wife. “Not that I am (I think) in much danger of ceasing to believe in God. The real danger is of coming to believe such dreadful things about Him. The conclusion I dread is not ‘So there’s no God after all,’ but ‘So this is what God’s really like. Deceive yourself no longer’” (*A Grief Observed* [Greenwich, CT: Seabury Press, 1963], 9–10).

*Closing Prayer:* Heavenly Father, hear us as we pray: “What can these anxious cares avail thee, These never-ceasing moans and sighs? What can it help if thou bewail thee, O’er each dark moment as it flies? Our cross and trials do but press, The heavier for our bitterness.” In Jesus’ most holy name. Amen.

*Assignment:* Read Job 9–19 and answer these questions:

- 1) What signs of hope do you see from Job?
- 2) Which one of these speaks most to you?