

## Seminar 1 - Getting our Bearings

### I. Introduction

#### ❖ Why is this subject important?

- The fact of suffering is arguably the greatest challenge to the Christian faith.
- It is more than a philosophical question.
- *“We want an explanation which bestows meaning on the events of pain and suffering.” (Peter Berger)*
- Suffering is folded into the fabric of our lives.
- The only condition for suffering is to live long enough.
- Sometimes suffering seems unjust and disproportionate.
- Suffering is the cost of faithfully following a crucified Saviour.
- Suffering is often the cost of fruitful ministry.
- God wants us to grow through suffering.
- God calls us to care for each other when we suffer.
- Suffering opens up opportunities for the gospel.

#### ❖ What are my qualifications?

- Pastoral experience.
- Personal experience.

#### ❖ The aim of these seminars

- Engage with biblical teaching.
- Equip us for suffering
- Equip us for ministry.

#### ❖ How will we approach our subject?

- Biblical exposition
- Theological reflection
- Practical and pastoral application

*“No matter what precautions we take, no matter how well we have put together a good life, no matter how hard we have worked to be healthy, wealthy, comfortable with friends and family, and successful with our career — something will inevitably ruin it.” Tim Keller*

#### ❖ In what ways do we experience suffering in this fallen world?

## II. Romans 8:28-30

### ❖ Romans 8:28-30 – God works all things for good

- An Affirmation (28)
- An Explanation (29)
- A Confirmation (30)

### ❖ Romans 8:31-39 - Four applications

- Protection (31)
- Provision (32)
- Pardon (33-34)
- Preservation (35-39)

## III. Suffering is universal

### ❖ Genesis 1-2...Revelation 21-22 – We live in the middle of the book

- **Job 5:7** – Suffering is certain – like sparks flying upwards.
- **Job 14:1** – Our days are few and full of trouble.
- **2 Corinthians 4:7** – Our bodies are feeble.
- It is a universal human experience - Christians are not immune.

### ❖ Vox pop

- *“Life was not meant to be like this!”*
- *“After being patient for so long, why is my marriage so miserable?”*
- *“I can’t go to church on Mother’s Day since we learned that we can’t have children.”*
- *“Chronic pain has invaded every part of my life. I cannot enjoy anything.”*
- *“He was everything to me. I thought we would grow old together. Now he is gone I don’t want to go on living.”*
- *“I thought that church was supposed to be a place of encouragement. How can it be so toxic?”*
- *“Why does this darkness never stop?”*

### ❖ We suffer because...

- We are human (Romans 8:22-23).
- We are Christians (Acts 14:22).
- We are faithful in service (Colossians 1:24).
- We are in a battle (Ephesians 6:10-20).
- We cannot see the big picture (Luke 24:13-25).
- We lose many of the things we love (Ruth 1:20).
- We struggle with sin (Romans 7:14-25).
- We have to deal with the consequences of our sins (2 Samuel 11-13).
- We struggle with the prosperity of the wicked (Psalm 73:1-14).
- We cannot understand God’s will (Habakkuk 1:2-4, 12-17).
- We become weary in well-doing (Numbers 11:10-15).
- We are rejected by God’s people (Jeremiah 20:7,14).
- We are crushed by crushing pressure (2 Corinthians 1:8-11).
- We see God’s people going astray (Galatians 1:6-10).
- We experience intense and unrelenting persecution (2 Corinthians 11:23-29)

## IV. Three Misconceptions – looking at the book of Job

### 1. “God is powerless to control evil”

#### ❖ Open theism

*“God is sympathetic, but he is powerless to do anything about our suffering. He has created people with free will, the world is complicated and the devil is real.”*

#### ❖ There are immediate causes

- There are natural explanations for suffering.
- **Natural phenomena**
  - ⇒ **1:16** - Fire from heaven killed the sheep.
  - ⇒ **1:19** - A mighty wind killed his children.
- **Human agency**
  - ⇒ **1:15** – The Sabeans stole his donkeys and killed his servants.
  - ⇒ **1:17** – Chaldeans stole his camels and killed his servants.
- **Disease**
  - ⇒ **2:7-8** – There was probably an organic origin to his painful disease.

#### ❖ There are intermediate causes

- There are supernatural explanations for suffering.
- Satan instigates the suffering of Job.
- **1:9-12** – He incites God and orchestrates disaster.
- **2:4-8** – He incites God and afflicts Job.
- Satan hates you.
- But Satan is not mentioned after Job 2 - he is only “*God’s devil.*”

#### ❖ God is in control

- God stands behind the trials we face.
- **1:10** – God puts a hedge around Job.
- **2:4-6** – Satan must gain permission before he can act.
- **Job 38-42** – God’s answer stresses his sovereignty – he does not apologize for his powerlessness.
- The book of Job affirms the sovereignty of God.
- The events of Job’s life did not fly under God’s radar.

### 2. “Believers should not suffer”

#### ❖ Job suffered in an appalling way

- **Job 1** – Job loses his possessions and family.
- **Job 2** – Job loses his physical health and well-being.
- We are all vulnerable in these areas.
- Was it because he was a particularly bad sinner?

#### ❖ “Suffering is always your fault”

- You are consciously or unconsciously disobeying God.
- You are hiding some secret sin.
- You have given in to the seductions of the devil.
- You lack faith.
- God wants you well – all the fault lies on your side.

❖ ***This is the theology of the friends***

- ***Job 4:7-8*** - Eliphaz
- ***Job 8:4*** - Bildad
- ***Job 11:5-6*** - Zophar
- Imagine a “suffering/sin index.”

❖ ***God defends Job's innocence***

- ***Job 1:1,8; 2:3*** – God boasts of Job.
- ***Job 42:7-8*** - God condemns the theology of the friends.
- ***John 9:1-3*** - Not all suffering is the direct result of personal sin.
- ***Mark 8: 34-38***– We follow a crucified Saviour.
- ***Ecclesiastes 4:1-3*** - Life does seem unfair.

❖ ***What are the untruths or half-truths which we are tempted to believe when we suffer?***

**3. “There is an easy answer”**

❖ ***“We should not have questions”***

- We should just trust God.
- God’s ways are easy to comprehend - it is not that complicated.
- The glib answers are the best answers.
- Christians should never have doubts.
- Expressing doubt is a sign of unbelief.

❖ ***Through his suffering Job expresses both faith and doubt***

• ***Faith***

- ⇒ ***Job 16:19-21*** - My witness in heaven.
- ⇒ ***Job 19:25-27*** - I know that my Redeemer lives.

• ***Doubt***

- ⇒ ***Job 3:1-26*** – Why was I born? Why am I still alive?
- ⇒ 300 questions - most come from Job.

❖ **Job 38-42 – God speaks**

- YHWH answered Job out of the storm.
- It is not “a jeer or a sneer”.
- He gives Job a mild rebuke and a full affirmation.
- He does not answer any of the questions.
- He reminds Job of His power and majesty.
- **Job 42:1-6** – Job’s godly response.

❖ **We may not see the reasons for our suffering**

- Joseph came to see the reasons for his trials (Genesis 50:20).
- There is no evidence that Job ever saw the reasons for his suffering.
- We may not see the see the immediate purposes – but we can see the big picture.

*Then Job replied:*

*"If only my anguish could be weighed and all my misery be placed on the scales!  
It would surely outweigh the sand of the seas- no wonder my words have been impetuous.*

*"Anyone who withholds kindness from a friend forsakes the fear of the Almighty.  
But my brothers are as undependable as intermittent streams, as the streams that overflow (Job 6:1-3, 14-15).*

*"I have heard many such things; miserable comforters are you all" (Job 16:2).*

❖ **Job’s Comforters were a disaster. What are the errors we should avoid when ministering to people who are suffering?**