

**Why do bad things happen to good people?
How are we supposed to handle suffering?
And coronavirus? What's our response?**

The oldest book in the Bible describes the suffering of a man called Job. His “friends” said that his adversity was brought about by his sin.

One of them said it was caused by his faulty righteousness.

This is a subject that the triumphalistic views of many leads to unhealthy denialism. The defeatism and negativity of others leads to despair.

Jesus did say that in this world we will have trouble, but that He was overcoming the world.

In Job's story we see how the devil tried both to alienate man from God by temptations and God from man by accusations.

God contains the adversity. He still does this today. He sets boundaries on adversity.

The end result for Job was both amazing restoration where Job prays for his detractors and also significant prosperity: “The Lord blessed the latter part of Job's life more than the first”.

So, what happens in suffering, in pain?

We are perplexed. We don't understand it. We don't have answers. It provokes questions and bewilderment. We do well to acknowledge our questions.

We experience a purifying. Fire purges! God speaks to us in the storms of life. The refiner's fire works the dross out of us, producing much finer gold. Some of the most amazing people have gotten there by what they endured.

We profit. We can use the adversity to enhance our authenticity. We can learn from the suffering and save others in some ways. There's propitiation in suffering well: others can benefit. We can comfort others with the comfort with which we have been comforted.

We find God's Presence! He meets us in our extremity, in the fire, in the coronavirus. He is an ever-present help in time of trouble. He is close to the broken-hearted.

So how should we respond?

We can persevere. We can choose to finish well. In due season we will reap if we do not give up.

We can lean into the Lord's protection. His rod and staff comfort us. He will not allow us to suffer beyond His empowering grace and presence.

We can discover God's provision for us. Often suffering awakens the Ubuntu of our common humanity. We can give and receive.

We find fresh perspectives. We see differently. We are made wiser by our difficulties. We also realise that what might have been intended for our harm God can use for our good.

When my father died by suicide at age 56 the grief and bewilderment I experienced pushed up many questions and fresh realisations.

Here are a few:

I realised that unresolved childhood abandonment or trauma doesn't just disappear in time. It needs processing. What we don't deal with deals with us!

Self-awareness is an essential first step to change.

Isolation is toxic, especially for ministers and helping professional specialists. We need relationships.

(Solitude, on the other hand, is restorative!)

Soul care is not an optional extra for wholesome living. It is an essential ingredient in our quest to be whole.

Our achievements and productivity do not satiate the need in our souls for connection. Our doing and performance are secondary to our being and belonging.

Vulnerability and transparency are the gateway to helpful relating.

Who we are is more important than what we do.

Failure is not wasted if we can learn from it.

Mask wearing and pretending are enemies of wholeness.

Truth, however uncomfortable, is always preferable to superficiality.

I am so grateful for the ongoing transformative engagement with the love of God. Back in 1993 the Lord showed me at the Tennessee River that there is nothing I could do to make Him love me more or less.

His love for me was His sovereign choice. I then prayed: “Lord teach me to live from this awareness”. It has been a wonderful and continuing adventure.

As Melissa said to her husband Jeremy Camp “Suffering doesn’t destroy faith. It refines it”. (In their true story movie: I Still Believe).

Our journey to wholeness is best engaged with the help of the Holy Spirit who leads us to know Jesus. Through Jesus we come to know the love of Father God. He “refathers” us as His sons and daughters.

We are no longer slaves to fear!

We can say Nevertheless!

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