

Truth in Grace

Truth in Grace Ministries

Dr. Dan Hayden, Director

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*When
you
don't
know
why*

W Dan's Desk

We all suffer occasionally, but for some it is a way of life. For them, pain and foreboding anticipation are a part of the daily routine—dark companions that are with them to the end. Grappling with the tough questions that seem to have no answers, they wrestle with the lurking shadows of anxiety and doubt. Prayer for courage and the strength to endure fill their minds and occupy their time. Eventually they long for the Lord to take them home and wonder why He tarries so long. It's hard to be terminally ill.

Learning to Trust in the Providence of God

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Bill is my friend. Last fall he was diagnosed with a massive malignant brain tumor. Since it was inoperable, the only recourse was radiation therapy. He had already lost the use of his left side, but the treatment left him even weaker. Then after months of radiation the doctors determined that it was having no effect. Chemotherapy was another possibility, but the chances of it working were just as doubtful. Furthermore, the quality of life would be further diminished due to the dramatic side effects of the medication. So Bill made a tough decision. He would forgo the treatment and commit his destiny to the loving providence of God. Bill is dying. God is preparing him for eternity.

Everyone who visits Bill is encouraged by his unwavering faith in the goodness of God and his abiding concern for the welfare of others. Visitors go to be a blessing, and leave being blessed. Bill is at peace with the thought of dying because he

knows that Christ is his Savior and the grave will have no sting. Questions like “Why me?” or “Where’s God?” are not his concern. He knows that God is loving and good despite the circumstances, and he has come to terms with the fact that sometimes there are no human answers to “why?”. With Bill there is no complaining and no self-pity, but he does long for it all to be over. He wants to go home.

Bill is isolated in the confines of his own experience, but he is not alone. There are thousands of others like Bill, who suffer without cause. Sometimes it is a terminal illness, but there are scores of other circumstances that are just as tough—a lifelong paralysis or handicap, a congenital defect or accident of life that requires multiple

surgeries and long rehabilitation, enduring situations of abuse or neglect, natural catastrophes and the devastation of war—the list is seemingly endless. In some measure, suffering is a part of life. And when we ask the question, “Why?” or “Why me?” the sound of our voice echoes back like words spoken in a hollow chamber. We hear only the repetition of the question—not the answer.

What shall we say to these things? Are there no answers? Have we been set adrift in a meaningless universe or is there a divine wisdom that can give us a perspective on the ultimate questions? The Book of Job is God’s answer to this haunting dilemma.

An Answer With No Meaning

The suffering of Job was a suffering without cause. Some have suggested a fault in his character—that he worried over the welfare of his children and by this opened the door to calamity. But the Book itself dispels that notion as a fruitless answer to Job’s dilemma. This was the combined voice of his

three friends, but their counsel was rejected as nonsense. Job’s problems were caused by the malevolent designs of Satan upon a man who was undeserving of such treatment. The real problem for us however, is the permission of God that unleashed Satan’s fury. It is obvious that God is in control of the situation, though Satan is the perpetrator of the Evil. But why would God allow Satan to do that? How do we understand God’s part in Job’s suffering?

Job does not know what we know, but our question is the same as his—why? Several answers are probed by the surrounding characters of his life, but all of them prove unsatisfactory. Then God speaks and we are taken by surprise. But we are ahead of ourselves. Let’s watch the story unfold as we eliminate the alternatives.

1. ANGER AT THE PROBLEM

The first attempt in the Book of Job to address the question of suffering is truly an answer with no meaning. It is offered by Job’s wife, and while we might sympathize with her reaction to the tragic incidents of her life (after all, she lost her children and home also), her answer is not a solution. She simply said to her husband, “*Do you still hold fast your integrity? Curse God and die!*” (2:9).

Now I don’t know about you, but I feel sorry for Mrs. Job. She is bitter and angry and disillusioned with God. The suffering has been incredible and her husband is sick and troubled. We are often critical of her, but in spite of her wrong response, I can understand her feelings and sense of disappointment. Who of us has not wrestled with anger and struck out at the circumstances of life? The temptation to be angry with God or to doubt His goodness can be oppressive. Such a response is natural to our humanness.

But anger at the problem does not help, nor is it a wise answer to the question of suffering. One of the things we learn in the Book of Job is that, although God is in ultimate control, He is not the author of Job’s suffering. Satan is. Therefore, anger at God is misdirected anger. Self-pity and a caustic spirit are simply reactions to bitterness—they provide no answer to the dilemma. Anger may be a natural response, but it is not a satisfying solution.

Possibilities Without Satisfaction

There are two answers offered by Job’s counselors that are sometimes true—but not in the case of Job. The Book probes these answers as valid explanations of the problem of suffering and gives considerable attention to the detailing of each argument. Yet as an ultimate solution to Job’s suffering, they each fall short. There is an aspect of suffering that does not fit the standard answers and that is what the Book of Job is all about.

2. ACCEPTANCE OF THE PUNISHMENT

Job’s three friends sat with him a whole week without uttering a word as a means of entering into the depth of his hurt. There was wisdom in that. They sought to understand

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before they sought to be understood. Sometimes comfort is just being there, showing that you care.

Then Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite, and Zophar the Naamathite began to offer their counsel. They each spoke multiple times and with much verbiage sought to fine-tune their arguments. Three voices in concert expressing their final solution as three variations on a theme—suffering is always the direct outcome of sin, and is God's judgment on it. In the words of Eliphaz, the oldest and wisest of the group—*“Remember now, who ever perished being innocent? Or where were the upright destroyed?”* (4:7).

They were right, to a point. There is a great deal of suffering in our lives that can be traced to unwise decisions and selfish self-serving behavior. We cause our own problems and suffering is simply the consequence of our sin. King David suffered deeply as a result of his indulgent adultery and homicidal cover-up. The child died, his family was in turmoil and, most tragically, his fellowship with God was broken. It was all very sad and yet it was all very understandable. The suffering was definitely a consequence of sin.

This is not always true, however. Not all suffering can be traced to a specific sin. It is true of course, that all suffering is a result of the general principle of sin in the universe, but this is not always true in specific situations. When the disciples questioned Jesus concerning the man who was blind from birth and said, *“Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he should be born blind?”* Jesus responded by saying, *“It was neither that this man sinned, nor his parents; but...that the works of God might be displayed in him”* (John 9:2-3). The man was suffering with blindness, but not because of any specific sin. This was the situation with Job. The solution offered by his three friends, although sometimes true, was not true in his case.

So how do we determine if God's judgment upon sin is a legitimate explanation for the suffering in our lives? Well, the answer is simple. If we are being disciplined for sin, we will know it. The connection will be obvious. I never punished my children without making sure that they knew the exact reason for the punishment. God is no different. Our response here is simply to confess our sin and go on. Sometimes the consequences of sin are temporary and sometimes they are permanent (like contracting AIDS from indulging in illicit sex). We simply bear the consequence and seek to be obedient with the rest of our lives.

3. AWARENESS OF THE PURPOSE

Elihu the Buzite was the youngest and most inexperienced of Job's counselors. He waited until the trio of voices were finished and then offered his analysis of the situation (chapters 32-37). Since the idea of punishment for sin did not seem to fit Job's situation, the only other alternative as far as he was concerned was that God must be teaching Job something. According to Elihu, suffering is God's means of getting our attention so that we will learn an important lesson. He



says, *“Behold, God is exalted in His power; Who is a teacher like Him?”* (36:22).

Again there is truth in this, but it is not the whole truth. God does use the adversities of life to make us wiser and more mature. That is the point James is making when he says,

Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect result, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing (James 1:2-4).

Personal suffering can be a time for reflection in order to reevaluate priorities, to make new insights into life, and to resolve needed changes in perspective. Sometimes the lessons are specific and at other times more general. If you get burned you say, “Wow, I'll never do that again.” Or, over a period of time various problems remind you of the frailty of life and the need for a more consistent humility. These are valuable lessons, and the occasions of suffering that God uses to instruct us are messengers of His mercy and grace.

Yet for Job this was not the full picture either. You see, if he was being taught something by God, it should have been clear what it was he was supposed to learn. God is not playing games with suffering and He is not vague in His instruction. So Job remained puzzled. He still didn't get it. In fact God Himself came to Job's defense when He said concerning Elihu, *“Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge?”* (38:2). Awareness of the purpose is not always the answer.

When God Speaks

Throughout the Book of Job, God is silent. Eliphaz, Bildad, Zophar, and Elihu have offered their solutions, but Job remains perplexed. None of the answers seem to fit his situa-

tion. He still doesn't know why he is suffering and yet he is still asking the question "Why?"

Perhaps this is your dilemma. Your suffering persists but you can see no clear purpose in it. You pray for wisdom but the heavens seem impenetrable as your prayers bounce off the clouds and return just as you prayed them. "Why am I suffering?" turns to "Why should I pray?" because apparently there are no answers. Yet as with Job, God breaks the silence and offers one more solution to the question of suffering. It takes you by surprise with an answer so simple that you wonder why it never crossed your mind.

4. APPRECIATION FOR PROVIDENCE

A rehearsal of the wonders of creation was not exactly what Job had in mind. At first it seemed irrelevant to the subject of suffering and the thoughts that haunted his mind. What was the connection and where was the wisdom? But the opening questions began to penetrate Job's mind and an obvious truth began to dawn upon his soul. God simply said,

Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell Me, if you have understanding, Who set its measurements, since you know? Or who stretched the line on it? On what were its bases sunk? Or who laid its cornerstone? (38:4-6).


In the presence of God, Job is getting smaller and smaller as God is getting bigger and bigger. Job knows the answer to none of these questions, but it is obvious that God does. The Creator of the universe with all of its variations and specialties is the God of his life, and Job is simply dwarfed into insignificance. In the end, Job discovers ultimate wisdom as he says,

"I have heard of Thee by the hearing of the ear; But now my eye sees Thee; Therefore, I retract, And I repent in dust and ashes" (42:5-6).

Human pragmatism had given way to an appreciation for Divine providence that rests its case in the wisdom of God. Job no longer needed to know. It was enough that a wise and omnipotent God was in control of all that was happening. You see, God never told Job why he was suffering. There is no explanation. On the other hand, a thoughtful consideration of God's wonderful wisdom, power and providential concern with regard to all that He has created put Job at ease concerning his own situation. Things were not out of control. He could trust God to make sense out of nonsense even if he didn't understand.

Now that's a wonderful place to be—in the capable hands of an all-wise all-knowing God. It's simply a matter of humbling ourselves in the presence of God and confessing our absolute and unwavering trust in His goodness. The surprise here is in the discovery that we don't need to know the answer to "Why?"—we only need to know "WHO!" We may not know the purpose of our suffering, but we are confident that there is design and meaning in everything God does. So we trust God with our life—even in death.

When You Do Know Who

Bill understands these things. He is confident in God's goodness and he is at peace with the consequences of his illness. Quite frankly, nothing in his situation makes sense. He is one of the most godly men I have known. He is in the prime of his productive years as a minister of the Gospel, and serves the Lord with selfless devotion. Yet he has been struck down by a crippling tumor and is slowly succumbing to the ravages of a vicious cancer. Unless God intervenes, he will soon see the Lord. But he will tell you "It's OK. God's in control—He knows what He's doing—it's OK." For you see, the ultimate question for him is not "Why"—but "WHO". His trust is in the Lord—for life or for death. 

We're Moving **News&Reviews**

Over the past four years *Truth in Grace* has enjoyed a wonderful relationship with Grace Church in western Michigan. Yet due to the increased involvement with *Truth in Grace*, Dan Hayden felt led of the Lord to resign from his pastoral duties at the church. He did this the first Sunday of December, 2000 to become effective April 1, 2001. Our Associate Pastor, Ken Gentzler, has accepted the challenge of moving into the Senior Pastor role, and we anticipate a smooth and wonderful transition.

At first it appeared as though *Truth in Grace* would remain in Michigan, but in early February, a decision was made by our combined ministries, including *Truth in Grace*, to move our operation to Orlando, Florida. Much prayer and thought went into this decision—and therein lies God's unmistakable direction.

Last fall it was determined that *The Scriptorium*, with its biblical manuscript collec-

tion, would move to Orlando to become a part of the *Holy Land Experience* being developed by Zion's Hope ministry. The exposure and influence of the collection in that setting would far exceed what we were experiencing in western Michigan. It was obvious to all of us that this would be a good move. So preparations for a *Scriptorium* facility and exhibit are under way in Orlando, with a target date of March, 2002 for a grand opening. Needless to say, enthusiasm for this project is high.

We then began to see the wisdom of consolidating our other ministries with *The Scriptorium*. The thing that binds all of us together is a strong commitment to the biblical text and a consistent literal hermeneutic. The manuscript collection is our visible demonstration of the reliable transmission of an authentic text—but our other ministries are the expository communication of that text. As independent

ministries, we have each been pursuing our unique agendas, but we are sensing the Lord's direction to consolidate our efforts in order to magnify our influence. So we are looking at the next year-and-a-half as a time of transition, with a goal of unifying our ministries under the singular title, *SOLA SCRIPTURA*. In a day of rampant pluralism and the insidious influences of post modernity, it is our desire to raise a strong voice for objective truth as revealed in the infallible record of God's Word.

Thus we are in the process of moving. Four families are already settled in the Orlando area, and nine others are anticipating a similar transition. We covet your prayers in this process as we continue to look for God's direction and blessing for this exciting endeavor. It is hard to be unsettled and in transition, but we are confident that God's leading always includes His provision. To God be the glory!

A Word from the Word

FULL OF COMPASSION

Have you ever been guilty of making a premature judgment—you accused someone of doing something bad, when in reality what they did was good? Embarrassing, wasn't it? You probably think twice now about making such a snap judgment. Yet many Christians make that mistake in their assessment of the ways of God. In their anger they accuse God of doing bad, but when it's all said and done, they will discover that God is wonderfully good. We are impetuous people and our judgments are often premature.

The story of Job is a case in point. Although we know that Satan is the real villain in the tragedies of Job's life, we accuse God of complicity in Job's suffering because Satan acted according to the permissive will of God. But God is working according to a grander scheme, and we would do well to reserve our opinion of Him until the end. This is the counsel of James as he draws our attention to the conclusion of Job's story. In James 5:11, he says,

You have heard of the endurance of Job and have seen the outcome of the Lord's dealings, that the Lord is full of compassion and is merciful (NAS).

In the final analysis, the Lord is seen to be merciful and full of compassion. The Greek word translated "full of compassion" is a wonderful testimony to the loving character of God. It is the word **polusplanchnos**—a compound Greek word emphasizing the extreme nature of His compassion.

The first part of the word is **polu** which is an adjective prefix meaning "many" or "numerous." In English it comes across as "poly" in such words as *polygamy* (many wives), *polyester* (a complex ester), and *polygraph* (an instrument for recording many physiological variables simultaneously). In other words, it emphasizes the abundant nature of something. It is the idea of "many."

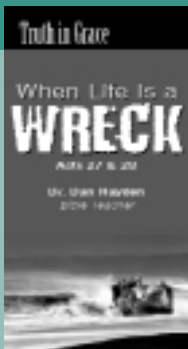
James 5:11
πολυσπλαγχνος

Now the word to which **polu** is connected is the word **splanchnos**, which is a word for the inner viscera (the intestines, or "guts"). It actually comes from the word **splen**—the "spleen." When we say "I had a gut reaction" or "I had butterflies in my stomach," we are expressing the idea of this word. Figuratively, it refers to the seat of emotions or inward affection. It is compassion that comes from the deepest resources of a person's inner self.

Therefore **polusplanchnos** is many inner responses of feeling and compassion. It is abundant compassion or, as it is translated in the NAS text, "full of compassion." You see, the Lord is not just compassionate, He is *abundantly* compassionate. He is full of inner feelings for His people as they go through the trials of life. God is not aloof and unconcerned, He is extremely compassionate and merciful.

Admittedly, it is hard to see this characteristic of God as we go through the Book of Job or as we endure the trials of life. It is not until the end that we will clearly see "*the outcome of the Lord's dealings*" (James 5:11). He has felt our hurts and identified with our pain. He has had a "gut reaction" over and over each time we have cried out to Him in our suffering. He is "full of compassion" toward His people, and He will see to it that the end result will be nothing but goodness throughout all of eternity.

So don't be premature in your judgment of God's ways in your life by accusing Him of complicity with evil. In the end you will be embarrassed beyond imagination—for all the while He has been **polusplanchnos**—full of compassion.



Hope in the Midst of the Storm

When Life Is a Wreck – Lessons from Acts 27 and 28. Life is not always fun and games. We would obviously prefer the good times when life is congenial and the winds are favorable. But mostly it is hard work, and sometimes it is dealing with adversity; it's just the way it is. The good news, however, is that the believer in Jesus Christ can face these things with an eternal hope. The man or woman of God who walks with the Lord is a perpetual optimist. There is a strength and wisdom from God that makes it possible for His people to "sail" against the wind.

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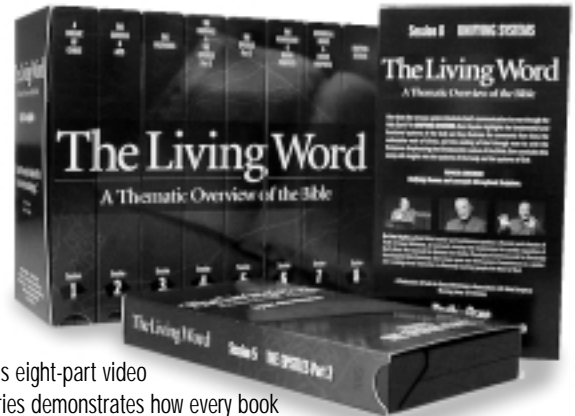
Our Truth in Grace two-minute devotional feature "A Word from the Word," is currently broadcasting on 30 stations around the country. Listed below are the newest stations that carry our program.

KARI - AM	550	Vancouver, BC	8:26 am & 6:35 pm
KWYD - AM	1580	Colorado Springs, CO	10:28 am
WFIF - AM	1500	New Haven, CT	9:58 am
WFCV - AM	1090	Fort Wayne, IN	10:57 am
WBCI - FM	105.9	Portland, ME	2:02 pm
WJLT - AM	650	Boston, MA	8:58 am & 4:48 pm
WVNE - AM	760	Worcester, MA	2:02 pm
KCCV - AM	760	Kansas City, MO	10:57 am
KSIV - AM	1320	St. Louis, MO	9:57 am
WDER - AM	1320	Nashua, NH	9:58 am
KQCV - AM	800	Oklahoma City, OK	6:27 am
WARV - AM	1590	Providence, RI	9:58 am
WCRV - AM	640	Memphis, TN	9:27 am
WEMP - AM	1250	Milwaukee, WI	7:30 am & 6:30 pm

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