



Living out the **Gospel** as we **Gather** and **Go**.

Equipping Class Fall 2017

When Life Doesn't Go as Planned

Teacher: Lee Boswell - Elder

Introduction:

This class will focus on issue of pain and suffering and attempt to provide insight into the doctrine of God's Justice (Theodicy) and practical insights for those going through suffering. As we live out the gospel and gather on Sundays, we want to equip you to be able to give comfort those who go through times of pain and suffering, and provide an answer for those who reject God on the grounds of evil.

Dates:

- Sunday Sept 24th, 2017 The Reality of Pain (What is pain and why does it exist?)
- Sunday October 1st, 2017 The Sovereignty of God in Pain
(Is God responsible for pain or obligated to prevent it?)
- Sunday October 8th, 2017 A Reason for Pain (Understanding How God uses Pain)
- Sunday October 15th, 2017 A Response to those in Pain (Comforting others in Pain)

Recommended Resources:

- D.A Carson, ***How Long, O Lord? Reflections on Suffering and Evil*** (Baker Academic, 2006).
- Ligon Duncan, ***Does Grace Grow Best in Winter?*** (P&R Publishing, 2009).
- John M. Frame, ***Apologetics: A Justification of Christian Beliefs*** (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: P&R Publishing, 2015).
- Norman L. Geisler, ***If God, Why Evil?*** (Bloomington, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 2011).
- Clay Jones, ***Why Does God Allow Evil? Compelling Answers for Life's Toughest Questions*** (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2017).
- Timothy Keller, ***Walking with God through Pain and Suffering*** (Penguin Books, 2015).
- Andreas J. Kostenberger, ***Truth in a Culture of Doubt: Engaging Skeptical Challenges to the Bible*** (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2014).
- C.S Lewis, ***The Problem of Pain*** (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co, 1962).
- Udo Middelman, ***The Innocence of God*** (Colorado Springs, CO: Paternoster Publishing, 2007).
- Barton Priebe, ***The Problem of Christianity: Six Unsettling Questions You Have Asked*** (Abbotsford, BC, Canada: Apologetics Canada Publishing, 2015).
- N.T. Wright, ***Surprised by Scripture: Engaging Contemporary Issues*** (New York: Harper Collins, 2014).
- Ravi Zacharias and Vince Vitale, ***Why Suffering? Finding Meaning and Comfort When Life Doesn't Make Sense*** (FaithWords, 2015).



When Life Doesn't Go as Planned: Sunday September 24nd, 2017

Session 1: The Reality of Pain and Suffering

Introduction:

- What the class hopes to accomplish
 - Weeks 1 and 2 are more doctrinal, philosophical, and theoretical
 - Weeks 3 and 4 are more practical

Teaching Segment #1:

- The fact of Pain does not escape anyone...we all know if first-hand
 - Everyone Suffers...the just and the unjust. It is common to man
 - The Question of Evil troubles people more than any other issue
 - The Believer
 - The Unbeliever
 - The Atheist
 - The Problem of Evil stated (the philosophical argument)
 - Does it prove God doesn't exist?
 - Video: "God and Suffering" – Peter Kreeft – PragerU (<https://youtu.be/cNtz5wgnopQ>)
 - Yet, the Answer is both Simple and incredibly Difficult
 - Lament Psalm: Psalm 22:1-11
 - ¹My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?
Why are you so far from saving me, from the words of my groaning?
 - ²O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer, and by night, but I find no rest.
 - ³Yet you are holy, enthroned on the praises of Israel.
 - ⁴In you our fathers trusted; they trusted, and you delivered them.
 - ⁵To you they cried and were rescued; in you they trusted and were not put to shame.
 - ⁶But I am a worm and not a man, scorned by mankind and despised by the people.
 - ⁷All who see me mock me; they make mouths at me; they wag their heads;
 - ⁸"He trusts in the LORD; let him deliver him; let him rescue him, for he delights in him!"
 - ⁹Yet you are he who took me from the womb; you made me trust you at my mother's breasts.
 - ¹⁰On you was I cast from my birth, and from my mother's womb you have been my God.
 - ¹¹Be not far from me, for trouble is near, and there is none to help.
- Best to begin with a proper understanding of what Scripture says about the issue – Grounded in Doctrine, before addressing it emotionally
 - Let's understand it in the head (intellectually) and then apply it to our heart (emotionally)
- Questions from the class.
 - What examples of evil, pain, and suffering do you see in the world? In your life?
 - How prevalent is evil in the world? (Examples of evil and suffering)
 - Do you think evil is more prevalent now than in the past?
 - What types/examples of evil do you see in the Bible?



- The Questions We Ask
 - Why does God allow so much suffering?
 - Why did God allow my loved one to die, or get cancer, or have a miscarriage?
 - Why does God not protect the children from terrible suffering?
 - Could God not stop the worst of the evils in this world?
 - How could there be any purpose in all of this?

Group Time: Answer the question in smaller groups:

- How does pain and suffering affect your view of God? Affect your faith?
 - Pain can draw people away from God
 - Pain can draw people to God

Teaching Segment #2:

- Our answers must be:
 - Biblically accurate
 - Theologically consistent
 - Contextually relevant
 - Personally applicable
- Definitions
 - Sovereignty: God's will is absolute in that it is not subject to the dictates of another
 - Omnipotence: God's power is absolute in perfection, extent and degree
 - Omniscience: God knows all past, present and future knowledge including that of people and events
 - Providence: God's governing prerogatives exercised within created order.
 - Divine Council: Events God has determined beforehand regarding the flow of and the unfolding of history in time within created order
 - **Suffering:** That which causes discomfort, pain, and disquietedness
 - **Evil** (in practice): Broadly that which is contrary to God or His order.
 - **Evil** (in principle): A privation or deviation of the good (absence of good)
- All suffering has its roots in evil, but not all suffering is evil.
- 2 Types of suffering
 - Moral
 - Natural
- 5 Key Points:
 - The Origin of Evil (Isaiah 14:12-15; Genesis 3)
 - God did not create evil
 - What about Isaiah 45:7? "...I create evil..." – Context is judgment on Israel
 - God DID allow evil to exist
 - It is the best option to have a world where pain can exist



Anselm: "I acknowledge, O Lord, with thanksgiving, that thou hast created this thy image in me, so that remembering thee, I may think of thee, may love thee. But this image is so effaced and worn away by my faults that, it is so obscured by the smoke of my sins, that it cannot do what it was made to do, unless thou renew and reform it. I am not trying, O Lord, to penetrate thy loftiness, for I cannot begin to match my understanding with it, but I desire in some measure to understand thy truth, which my heart believes and loves, For I do not seek to understand in order to believe, but I believe in order that I might understand. For this too I believe, that unless I believe, I shall not understand."

- Satan sinned, introducing evil into existence (Isaiah 14:12-15)
- Man sinned, introducing evil into God's creation (Genesis 3; Romans 5:12)
- The Depth of Evil (Genesis 6:5; Jeremiah 17:9; Romans 5:12-21; 1 John 5:19)
 - Sin has brought death (physical and spiritual)
 - Sin has cursed man (every man sins)
 - The heart of man is wicked (Jeremiah 17:9)
 - Genesis 6:5:
"The LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually."
- The Extent of Evil (Genesis 3; Romans 8:18-22)
 - All of Creation has been affected by sin
 - Man - Moral Evil
 - Creation - Natural Evil
- The Inexplicability of Evil (Job)
 - Why there is pain is a simple question to answer: SIN
 - Why God doesn't prevent it for those He loves is more difficult to answer
 - Easy to see why evil (bad) people suffer, but why 'good' people
 - We cannot expect to know the Hows and Whys of everything
 - That alone is not much solace
 - There is always purpose in what God allows.
 - Example of Job: He never learned why he was suffering
- The Finality of Evil (Revelation 21:1-4)
 - One day there will be no more pain
 - Began when sin entered the world (Genesis 3)
 - Ends when sin is done away (Revelation 21)
 - Interesting that the first description of the new heaven and earth describes it as one without suffering
 - Jesus defeated Pain and Suffering when he defeated sin on the Cross (1 Corinthians 15:55-57; Romans 6:8-10)
- **The Cross of Christ Provides the Remedy for our Sin and Suffering**

Takeaway Truths:

- Understand the kinds of suffering we face
- Understand the problem of evil as it relates to the Existence of God
- Understand where evil (pain and suffering) came from
- Understand the duration of evil – one day it will end

NEXT: Why doesn't God prevent the worst suffering?



When Life Doesn't Go as Planned: Sunday October 1st, 2017
Session 2: The Sovereignty of God in Pain and Suffering

Introduction:

- Review last week
 - Pain and Suffering are the direct result of Sin
 - 5 Points concerning the Reality of Pain (Origin, Prevalence, Extent, Inexplicability, Finality)
 - 2 Types of Evil (Moral and Natural)
 - Sub-types: Accidental and Spiritual (demonic activity)
 - Suffering will drive us toward God or away from him
 - **Ask:** What are some of the reactions we have toward suffering? We get angry; we get depressed; we lose faith; we draw closer...

- Issues addressed in this session:
 - Is God ever responsible for Evil?
 - How does Man's free will play a part in suffering
 - Why doesn't God prevent evil?
 - Is God obligated to prevent Evil?

Teaching Segment #1:

- How does our sin affect the issue of pain and suffering?
 - Do we deserve it?
 - We must understand how bad our Sin is and how great His holiness is
 - The issue really isn't "why does God allow us to suffer, but why doesn't God pour His wrath upon us now"
 - Not an issue of "The Problem of Pain", but "The Problem of Good", why does God give us so much good when all we deserve is His righteous wrath (Romans 1:18)
- How Does God's Sovereignty affect the issue of suffering?
 - Our view of God in light of suffering:
 - He mourns with us and for us (Genesis 6:6 – God was grieved...)
 - God can be God and suffering still exist
 - Providence vs Sovereignty
 - Sometimes God does prevent suffering ...these are examples of His Providence when He miraculously steps in and counters or prevents the effects of moral and natural evil.
 - Sometimes we are aware of it
 - Sometimes we may know even know it
 - Sometimes God does not prevent suffering...this is an example of His Sovereignty, where we must trust Him
 - God uses moral choices and natural disaster for his purposes.
 - Joseph and his brothers (Genesis 50:20)
 - Assyria and Babylon taking Israel into captivity
 - There are a couple of examples where God directly brought about pain and all of them were times of judgment: The Flood and Hell



- Key Bible Passages about God's Sovereign control:
 - Sustainer of all things (Colossians 1:17)
 - Transcends all things (Psalm 8:1; Psalm 97:9)
 - Knows all things (Psalm 147:5; Isaiah 40:26; Isaiah 46:10; Matthew 10:29-30; Hebrews 4:14)
 - Can do all things (Matthew 19:26; Jeremiah 32:27; Luke 1:37)
 - Controls all things (Job 42:2; Psalm 135:6; Proverbs 16:4; Proverbs 16:33; Ephesians 1:11-12)
 - Purposes all things (Isaiah 46:10; Psalm 115:3; Daniel 4:35; Exodus 33:19; Romans 9:15)

Group Time: Answer the question in smaller groups:

- If we see suffering in the world and 'would have prevented it if we could' and yet God does not/did not, does that make us more moral than God?
 - Who serves Whom?
 - The Creator of the universe is not subject to our desires and demands.
 - Do we really expect God to be at our beck and call and swoop in when we want him to come and fix something in our life?
 - Our view of Our Sin and His Holiness means He
 - We base our view of sin upon comparing it to other examples ("I'm not as bad as...").
 - God bases His view of sin upon His own holiness
 - Which instances of pain should we expect Him to prevent? All of them?
 - One example disregards the fact that hundreds of different types of suffering happens thousands of times a day. Should God step in every time?
 - Are there certain types of suffering that He should prevent, or for certain people?
 - **Ask:** What are the implications if God were to miraculously prevent suffering?
 - It would disrupt the natural order of physical life
 - It would hinder the full exercise of moral freedom
 - It would disrupt the natural order necessary for making rational and moral choices
 - It would defeat the conditions for moral improvement
 - It would hinder one of God's most effective ways of providing moral warnings

Teaching Segment #2:

- Is God Obligated to Prevent evil?
- Quote from Kostenberger:
 - Do not "underestimate the majesty of God, or minimize the sheer evil of humanity's rebellion against God as taught in Scripture." Often our "understanding of evil is limited to the horizontal level, people perpetrating evil toward other human beings. The Bible affirms the horizontal nature of evil but claims the root of evil is vertical; that is; acts are in the final analysis rebellion against God. According to the Bible, ultimately all horizontal offenses are vertical offenses against God...evil is evil because it offends a holy and righteous God."
 - "The magnitude of this offense is difficult for humans to imagine, especially in this day and age when personal accountability is in increasingly short supply...We approach the question of God and his role in human suffering with the notion that we are undeserving of this evil world. Yet the Bible sees things in view of the cosmic rebellion and insists that God graciously gives good things to the world despite our evil. From this perspective, perhaps it would be more



appropriate to speak of the 'problem of good': in view of all our individual and corporate evil, how is it that God, in his love, gives us so many of the good things we enjoy in this world?"

- Video Segment: "Why Do Bad Things Happen" - Voddie Baucham
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ymh5PdvS-S0>
- **The Cross of Christ is the Greatest Response to our Suffering.**
 - Jesus suffered the agony of the cross, but even more, He endured the sins of mankind upon himself to pay the ransom for our sin.

Takeaway Truths:

- God's Sovereignty does not require Him to prevent all evil
- Pain and Suffering occur at the same time that God is Sovereign
- A Shift in Perspective: "God is not subject to us and our desires, but we to His"



When Life Doesn't Go as Planned: Sunday October 8th, 2017
Session 3: A Reason for Pain (Understanding How God uses Pain)

Introduction:

- Issues addressed in this session:
 - How does God use pain and suffering for His purpose?
 - Is there always a purpose in suffering?

Teaching Segment #1:

- A Few Things we say:
 - Matter of Perspective (evils of this world are nothing compared to the joy that awaits us in heaven)
 - Evil Defines Good (without evil we wouldn't truly understand good)
 - Reminds us how bad sin really is
 - Reminds us how merciful God really is
 - God is more than just "good" and "powerful"
 - God's ways are greater than ours and we cannot always understand His purpose

Group Time: Answer the question in smaller groups:

- What answers have you or others given as to why suffering is happening?

Teaching Segment #2:

- A Few Responses:
 - Greater Good Defense
 - "God will always bring about a greater good from suffering"
 - This view is hard to defend because there are times when the suffering seems to far outweigh the good that comes from it
 - Maybe we don't see all the good
 - Maybe some good comes 'in spite of suffering' but not necessary always more good.
 - This view has some merit but is inadequate. There is more....
 - Free Will Defense
 - Because God has given man free will there are consequences that come from sin
 - There are times God wishes to bless us but our choices prevented Him from choosing to do so (Matthew 23:37)
 - This view has merit but is still inadequate to answer the question. There is more...
 - Judgment/Discipline (Suffering because of sin)
 - God uses suffering to discipline us (Psalm 32; Hebrews 12:3-11; Deuteronomy 20:16-17)
 - God used the Assyrians and Babylonians to discipline/punish Israel for disobedience
 - This view has merit, but does not answer every circumstance of suffering. There is more...
 - Creation-Order Theodicy
 - God is morally justified in allowing gratuitous evil in this world.



- He honors His Word and all He promised was that death would come if man disobeyed (Genesis 2:17) The curse is real!
 - Because man was lord over creation, when man fell, it affected all of creation and this explains natural evil (Romans 8:22)
 - God is the faithful Creator—He is faithful to the order He has established (1 Peter 4:19)
 - God has not obligated Himself either by promise or covenantal word to bring “good” out of evil—He has only promised to redeem men from evil (Genesis 3:15)
 - However, at certain points and under certain circumstances God can (and has), when it is consistent with His character and purpose intervened in the affairs of men because of His goodness, in answer to the prayer of His people, or because of His grace.
 - Some evil in this world is without purpose and God is under no obligation to do anything with it except condemn it.
 - God’s commandments are designed to diminish the amount of evil in this world, so it is not so much that man should expect God to bring “good” from evil, but that man should refrain from doing evil.
 - God may, for His own good reasons, bring some good from some evil, but it is not as an explanation for why the evil occurred—the “good” most often is in spite of the evil.
 - When the Christian suffers for righteousness sake, she can be assured that she will not be separated from God and that God is in some way working good in her life (Romans 8:28-39).
 - The Christian, when suffering for any reason, must always look to the Father of mercies the God of all comfort— and not look for the “Good” (2 Corinthians 1: 1-6).
 - It is possible in all situations of suffering, that the Christian can be a testimony of God’s grace at work in her life (2 Corinthians 12:9).
 - The Christian Hope is the coming Kingdom (Romans 8:18)
 - Therefore, if the Christian does not claim the greater good, the atheist’s argument against God is greatly weakened as there is no obligation on the Christian to demonstrate that the Good has obtained. Furthermore, the Christian’s focus in suffering is re-directed from looking for the “good” to looking to the Father of mercies, the God of all comfort.
- Key Bible Passages:
 - Sometimes God uses evil for good (Genesis 50:20; Habakkuk 1:5-11)
 - Sometimes God uses evil to discipline (Psalm 32; Hebrews 12:3-11)
 - Sometimes God uses righteous ones to discipline (Deuteronomy 20:16-17)
 - Sometimes God uses evil ones to discipline (2 Kings 18:9-12)
 - Sometimes God uses evil to show us something better (Romans 8:18)
 - Sometimes God uses evil for His glory (John 9:3)
 - Sometimes God uses evil for our maturity (Colossians 1:24-29)
 - Conclusion: We don’t have all the answers but we have a God who does
 - Video: “The Problem of Evil” – John Piper (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4qpMtg48f6s>)
 - **The Cross of Christ Provides the Greatest Example of Suffering**



Takeaway Truths:

- Understand the difference between why evil exists and how God uses it
- Understand that there is not just one answer to why God allows evil to happen
- Understand that our faith can be strengthened through suffering and not weakened



When Life Doesn't Go as Planned: Sunday October 15th, 2017
Session 4: A Response to those in Pain (Comforting others in Pain)

Introduction:

- Issues addressed in this session:
 - How to comfort others going through pain

Teaching Segment #1:

- How should we respond
 - Always be aware what you say and what not to say
 - Sometimes it is best to say nothing
 - Be a comfort to those in need
 - Be truth to those in need
 - Be strength to those in need
 - Be a light to those in need (point them to Christ)
- Key Bible Passages:
 - Job (the progression of dialogue with Job and his friends)
 - 2 Corinthians 1:3-7
 - 1 Peter 4:19 (Example of passage with another context)
 - Galatians 6:2
 - Mathew 22:39
 - Matthew 6:31-34

Group Time: Answer the question in smaller groups:

- What positive and negative experiences have you had from others (or yourselves) when going through painful circumstances

Teaching Segment #2:

- Look at how Jesus ministered with Mary, Martha, and others when their brother Lazarus suffered:
 - **Be Personal:** Jesus wept with them
 - **Be Prayerful:** Jesus prayed for them
 - **Be Practical:** Jesus helped. Ask how you can help and encourage
 - **Be Pro-active:** Jesus went to go and awake him. Don't wait for someone who is suffering to ask for help
 - **Be Persistent**
 - **Be Positive:** Proverbs 25:11 states, *"A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in pictures (a setting) of silver."* A timely word is both beautiful and valuable.
- What to Say and Do:
 - Don't say unkind, incorrect, or untimely things
 - Speak truth when the time is right
 - See them; Listen to them; Weep with them; Love them



- **What Not to Say/Do:**
 - Everyone suffers differently. Some speak. Some are silent. Some vent all their feelings to anyone and everyone, while others simply shut down. For those of us who want to comfort the suffering, the Bible simply doesn't tell us what to say exactly. Solomon admonishes us on a number of occasions to be ever so selective with the timing and tone of our words. "A word fitly spoken is like golden apples in a setting of silver." (Prov. 25.11) Or "a gentle tongue can break a bone." (Prov. 25.15)
 - Don't try to give them the answer as to why it happened:
 - "It will all work out for the better"
 - "It must be some kind of punishment for sin"
 - Etc...

- **The Cross of Christ Provides the Greatest Comfort Thru Suffering**
 - Peace in any and every circumstance can be found in Christ
 - Philippians 4:6-9
 - Bring it to Christ in prayer
 - Continue meditating on Him
 - Continue serving Him
 - The Peace of God will be with you

- Final remarks on the series:
 - Any questions/comments?
 - Was this series helpful?

Takeaway Truths:

- Understand that giving doctrine is better proactive than reactive
- Understand that our faith can be strengthened through suffering