

Growing From Your Past Bad Things Happen to Good People – Another Look

Introduction

"If I could meet the author of the Ninety-second Psalm, I would first congratulate him on having composed a masterpiece of devotional literature...But having said that, I would be obliged to point out that there is a lot of wishful thinking in his theology...I find that I cannot share the optimism of the Psalmist that the righteous, in the long run, will flourish like the palm tree and give testimony to God's uprightness" (Harold Kushner – When Bad Things Happen to Good People, pp. 17-18)

"We can see the argument of the book of Job as an argument over which of the three statements we are prepared to sacrifice, so that we can keep on believing in the other two" (p. 43).

"Let me suggest that the author of the book of Job takes the position which neither Job nor his friends take. He believes in God's goodness and Job's goodness, and is prepared to give up his belief...that God is all powerful. Bad things do happen to good people in this world, but it is not God who wills it. God would like people to get what they deserve in life, but He cannot always arrange it. Forced to choose between a good God who is not totally powerful, or a powerful God who is not totally good, the author of the book of Job chose to believe in God's goodness" p. 48-49).

"I believe in God. But I do not believe the same things about Him that I did years ago, when I was growing up or when I was a theology student. I recognize His limitations. He is limited in what He can do by laws of nature and by the evolution of human nature and human moral freedom. I no longer hold God responsible for illnesses, accidents, and natural disasters, because I realize that I gain little and I lose so much when I blame God for these things. I can worship a God who hates suffering but cannot eliminate it more easily than I can worship a God who chooses to make children suffer and die, for whatever exalted reason" (p. 147).

4 main emphases thus far in this series:

1. People tend to fall into one of two extremes when thinking about/discussing this topic:
 - The past is everything
 - The past is nothing
2. Your past can be one of your best friends
3. Your past can be one of your worst enemies
4. Your past can be divided into four categories
 - a. Was this particular event initiated by your own sin, or by the sin of someone else (or simply the pain of living in a sin cursed world)?
 - b. How did you respond to what occurred?

I. The Reality of Suffering

- A. Pain and suffering are inescapable in this life

Job 5:7 - For man is born for trouble, as sparks fly upward.

B. Acknowledging our confusion and hurt is an important part of the growth process

Psalm 73:12-14 - *Behold, these are the wicked; and always at ease, they have increased in wealth. Surely in vain I have kept my heart pure and washed my hands in innocence; for I have been stricken all day long and chastened every morning.*

2 Corinthians 6:11 - *Our mouth has spoken freely to you, O Corinthians, our heart is opened wide.*

2 Corinthians 6:13 - *Now in a like exchange—I speak as to children—open wide to us also.*

C. The church is called to help both sinners and sufferers

Romans 12:15 - *Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep.*

1 Thessalonians 2:7 - *But we proved to be gentle among you, as a nursing mother tenderly cares for her own children.*

II. The Revelations of Suffering

A. Your view of fairness

1. A central issue at the beginning of Psalm 73

Psalm 73:16 - *When I pondered to understand this, it was troublesome in my sight*

2. Also a core issue for Rabbi Kushner

"I am the rabbi of a congregation of six hundred families, or about twenty-five hundred people. I visit them in the hospital, I officiate at their funerals, I try to help them through the wrenching pain of their divorces, their business failures, their unhappiness with their children. I sit and listen to them pour out their stories of terminally ill husbands or wives, of senile parents for whom a long life is a curse rather than a blessing, of seeing people whom they love contorted with pain or buried by frustration. And I find it very hard to tell them that life is fair, that God gives people what they deserve and need. Time after time, I have seen families and even whole communities unite in prayer for the recovery of a sick person, only to have their hopes and prayers mocked. I have seen the wrong people get sick, the wrong people be hurt, the wrong people die young" (p. 10).

3. A question for you to consider

Do you really want a God who is simply "fair"?

B. Your view of truth

1. The Psalmist's solution

v. 17 - *until I came into the sanctuary of God...*

Psalm 61:1-2 - *Hear my cry, O God; give heed to my prayer. From the end of the earth I call to You when my heart is faint; lead me to the rock that is higher than I.*

Psalm 119:71 - *It is good for me that I was afflicted, that I may learn Your statutes.*

2. A turning point for many

"The God of the fable, held up as a figure to be worshipped for so many generations, is very much like an (insecure) ancient king, rewarding people not for their goodness but for their loyalty" (p. 47).

"I take these lines to mean 'if you think it is so easy to keep the world straight and true, to keep unfair things from happening to people, you try it.' God wants the righteous to live peaceful, happy lives, but sometimes even He can't bring that about. It is too difficult even for God to keep cruelty and chaos from claiming their innocent victims. But could man, without God, do better?" (p. 49).

C. Your view of God

1. Is God sovereign?

Psalm 33:10-11 - *The Lord nullifies the counsel of the nations; He frustrates the plans of the peoples. The counsel of the Lord stands forever, the plans of His heart from generation to generation.*

"God is in control. He is sovereign. He does whatever pleases Him and determines whether we can do what we have planned. This is the essence of God's sovereignty: His absolute independence to do as He pleases and His absolute control over the actions of all His creatures. No creature, person, or empire can either thwart His will or act outside the bounds of His will" (Jerry Bridges, Trusting God, p. 34).

Proverbs 19:21 - *Many plans are in a man's heart, but the counsel of the Lord will stand.*

Lamentations 3:37 - *Who is there who speaks and it comes to pass, unless the Lord has commanded it?*

2. Is God Powerful?

"If we had grown up, as Job and his friends did, believing in an all-wise, all-powerful, all-knowing God, it will be hard for us, as it was for them, to change our way of thinking about Him (as it was hard for us, when we were children, to realize that our parents were not all powerful, that a broken toy had to be thrown out because they could not fix it, not because they did not want to" (p. 51).

Jeremiah 14:22 - *Are there any among the idols of the nations who give rain? Or can the heavens grant showers? Is it not You, O Lord our God? Therefore we hope in You, for You are the one who has done all these things.*

3. Is God good?

2 Samuel 22:31 - *As for God, His way is blameless; the word of the Lord is tested; He is a shield to all who take refuge in Him.*

D. Your view of man

1. Bad things happen to good people

Psalm 14:1-3 - *The fool has said in his heart, "There is no God." They are corrupt, they have committed abominable deeds; there is no one who does good. The Lord has looked down from heaven upon the sons of men to see if there are any who understand, who seek after God. They have all turned aside, together they have become corrupt; there is no one who does good, not even one.*

2. Who's on trial here?

Psalm 73:21-22 - *When my heart was embittered and I was pierced within, then I was senseless and ignorant; I was like a beast before You.*

3. What about your part?

E. Your view of trials

1. Not a direct cause/effect

2. Can draw us closer to Him

Psalm 73:25-26 - *Whom have I in heaven but You? And besides You, I desire nothing on earth. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.*

3. Can bring God glory

John 9:3 - *Jesus answered, "It was neither that this man sinned, nor his parents; but it was so that the works of God might be displayed in him."*

4. Can purify God's people

James 1:4 - *And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.*

F. Your view of the Savior

Hebrews 2:10 - *For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things, and through whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to perfect the author of their salvation through sufferings.*

G. Your view of eternity

1. A great phrase in the Bible – “a little while”

1 Peter 5:10 - *After you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen and establish you.*

2. The possibility of simultaneous emotions

1 Thessalonians 4:13 - *But we do not want you to be uninformed, brethren, about those who are asleep, so that you will not grieve as do the rest who have no hope.*

III. The Resolution of Suffering

A. Avoid the tendency to compare your sufferings to others

B. Let God's Word frame your view of suffering

2 Timothy 1:12 - *For this reason I also suffer these things, but I am not ashamed; for I know whom I have believed and I am convinced that He is able to guard what I have entrusted to Him until that day.*

C. Consider the end of those who handle suffering well, and those who handle prosperity poorly

Psalm 73:17 - *Until I came into the sanctuary of God; then I perceived their end.*