



ELEPHANT IN THE ROOM

PART 4 - THE FEAR OF SUFFERING

HARVEST CHAPEL | WES BELL

Ice Breaker: If you could ask God only one question and you knew He would give you an answer, what would you ask?

Read 2 Corinthians 12:1-10

Why is there pain and suffering in the world?

- This very question assumes that a loving God and suffering cannot go together.

Three basic problems that are common to everyone, everywhere, at some time in this life.

- Sickness
 - Sorrow
 - Suffering
-
- You may temporarily escape one or even two of these, but you will never escape all three.
 - Even the most godly of people are not exempt from pain and suffering.
 - The Apostle Paul knew what it was like to suffer, even when he was doing what God wanted him to do. In 2 Corinthians 12, he mentions a problem that was so difficult and painful, that even with his great faith, he found himself asking the question, “**Where is God when it hurts?**” It was through his pain and suffering that God taught him some of the greatest lessons of his life:

1. GOD IS _____ IN OUR SUFFERING - ALWAYS

Read 2 Corinthians 12:7

- There has been much debate over what this “thorn in the flesh” was. We aren’t told what this thorn is. It remains anonymous because no matter what your particular thorn might be, the same God that gave Paul victory over his thorn can give you victory over yours.
- Paul tells us twice that the thorn was to keep him from, “getting puffed up” and to keep him from “getting proud.”

Q: Have you ever noticed that when things are going great in life, it is sometimes difficult to stay close to God? Why do you think that is?

- We can know that God is with us in our suffering, because even Jesus suffered like we do.
- All you have to do is look at the cross and know that not only does God suffer for us, but God suffers with us.

Deuteronomy 31:8 - “It is the Lord who goes before you. He will be with you; he will not leave you or forsake you. Do not fear or be dismayed.”

2. GOD _____ TO US THROUGH OUR SUFFERING

Read 2 Corinthians 12:8

Q: Have you ever asked God to heal you of a sickness, or relieve you of a sorrow, or alleviate your suffering, but He didn't do it? Is there a time you can look back at with gratitude that God did not answer the way you expected?

- Three times Paul didn't just pray, he pleaded with God to remove this thorn, but God didn't do it. There was nothing wrong with the prayer and there was nothing wrong with God. It wasn't that God didn't hear Paul's prayer and it wasn't that God didn't care. Paul got an answer to his prayer, it simply wasn't the answer he wanted - it was the answer he needed.

2 Corinthians 12:9a - "But he said to me..."

- Right in the middle of his praying, right in the middle of his pleading, right in the middle of his hurting, right in the middle of his suffering, God spoke to Paul.

2 Corinthians 12:9 - But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness."

- It was in the middle of Paul's suffering that God taught Paul some things he would have never learned any other way.
- We often hear God more easily in the bad times than in the good times.
- Suffering reminds us of just how dependent upon God we really are and forces us to focus on Him.

"God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks to us in our conscience, but shouts to us in our pains; it is His megaphone to rouse a deaf world." - C. S. Lewis

- God's answer to grief is grace.
- There is no grace without suffering and there is no grace apart from suffering.

3. GOD _____ US BY OUR SUFFERING

- There is no such thing as a pain free life.
- What determines victory or defeat is how you are affected by the suffering.

Q: What does suffering usually produce in your life - resistance, resentment, and bitterness or prayerfulness, patience, faith and trust?

2 Corinthians 12:7-10, MSG - "And then He told me my grace is enough; it is all you need. My strength comes into its own in your weakness. Once I heard that I was glad to let it happen. I quit focusing on the handicap and began appreciating the gift. It was a case of Christ' strength moving in on my weakness. Now I take limitations in stride and with good cheer. These limitations that cut me down to size - abuse, accidents, opposition, bad breaks, I just let Christ take over! And so, the weaker I get, the stronger I become."

- You can look at suffering either as an enemy to avoid, a master to surrender to, or a servant that God can use to minister in your life.
- **Whenever you are weak, God gets the opportunity to show His strength.**

Q: How has God shown you grace in your suffering? Take a moment to thank Him for His unending grace.