

Paper # 1 is the first of the Nine Papers in our Course on ...

“Pain, Suffering, Death and the ‘Whys?’ Thereof”

Our prayer is that this course will be of great value, comfort, and use to you whether you are preparing for or actually going through pain, suffering and approaching death or are trying to counsel and minister to others going through them.

Our Nine Papers are

- Paper # 1: On the Top 10 Questions of “*Pain, Suffering, Death and the ‘Whys’ Thereof*” ... On Christianity occupying the Intellectual High Ground ... On Suffering: Physical and Intellectual ... On the Nature of God and the Nature of God’s Love for His Children ... On the Total Sovereignty of God over all Suffering and Pain ... On the “*Common Thread*” of our Ten Questions
- Paper # 2: The “Whys?” of Suffering – General Reasons
- Paper # 3: The “Whys?” of Suffering – Suffering for God’s Glory
- Paper # 4: The Many “Whys?” of Job’s Sufferings – God’s Answer and Job’s Reaction
- Paper # 5: On Facing Death (“the last enemy”) and ‘Dying Well’
- Paper # 6: On Facing Suffering and ‘Suffering Well’
- Paper # 7: On Attaining an Assurance of your Salvation – Which is the Key Source of Comfort for a Christian Facing Long-Term Suffering and Death
- Paper # 8: On “How Can I Know for Sure That I am a Christian?” – Which is the Vital Consideration in “Attaining an Assurance of Your Salvation” – and a “Consideration” which You are Commanded by both Peter and Paul to Search Out (Confirm 2 Peter 1:10 and 2 Corinthians 13:5)
- Paper # 9: From “Milk” to “Solid Food” – The Joyous and Glorious Road to “Full Age” Christian Maturity (Hebrews 5:12-14)

Note: We are covering the topic of “*Facing Suffering and Suffering Well*” (which is what most people are probably most interested in) *after* the section on “*Facing Death and Dying Well*” because the “*Facing Death and Dying Well*” section contains many necessary and relevant things to know before taking an in-depth look at “*Suffering and Suffering Well*”. We must also remember that “*Death*” and “*the Dying Process*” are two related, but, very separate things, and that a lot of the “*Dying Process*” is more appropriately covered under “*Suffering*”.

We want to note upfront that our course cannot reduce your *physical* pain and suffering – for that is governed by God and the wisdom He imparts to your doctors. But we can greatly help and even eliminate many of the *intellectual* aspects of your pain and suffering, especially those related to a concern over God’s love for you – which will most certainly help to make the physical aspects of your suffering more endurable. You will come to see that you *can* face pain, suffering, and death and still ...

Experience the “*joy of your salvation*” ...

Know “*the peace of God, which passes all understanding*” ... and ...

Know the rich and wonderful blessings of *trusting in, serving, and witnessing for* God even in the midst of the most painful and difficult time of your life.

The Main Thrust of our Course is Three-fold ...

1. To help prepare you beforehand to successfully face suffering and death in a Christ-like manner when confronted by them.
2. To help you to be able to minister to others facing suffering and death.
3. To help you to better understand the nature of God’s inner core Being and the nature of what C. S. Lewis calls the “*Intolerable Compliment*” of God’s love for you – and how they both relate to you in a period of prolonged suffering and approaching death.

We especially want to help you to be prepared beforehand to successfully handle the times of depression, despair, anger, and doubts of God’s love and of your own salvation that so often accompany prolonged suffering and approaching death

Again, there is such a thing as “*suffering well*” and “*dying well*” – and you, with God’s help, can do both.

We would make a Special Plea to you young and healthy people who are tempted to say
... “*This is old folks’ stuff – I’m outta here!*”

We would urge you to stay for the duration of the course for the following three reasons ...

1. You may not be facing death or suffering now, but some day you will
2. We never know what a day might bring forth and you do not want to presume upon God for continued good health and long life. It is just as the Apostle James writes ...

“... you do not know what will happen tomorrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away.” (James 4:14)

Indeed, sad as it is, I have over my lifetime known a number of young people that have suffered and died.

The third reason that you should stay in the course is because ...

3. You have many people in your life that either now or soon might be facing suffering and/or death – parents, grandparents, older friends, older relatives, neighbors, acquaintances, and so on – people that can be helped by what you will learn in this course. The Christian, whether a preacher or not, should always *“Be ready in season and out of season” (2 Timothy 4:2)* to minister to those in need and to *“always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you.” (1 Peter 3:15)*

So, again, we would urge you to stay.

And so – On to Suffering and Death

Suffering and Death are the two greatest fears of both evangelicals and unbelievers. People are constantly troubled by them. Indeed, the Bible tells us that Jesus came to die so that ...

“... through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.” (Hebrews 2: 14-15)

It is very noteworthy that one of the reasons Jesus came to die was to *“release”* us from the *“bondage”* of the *“fear of death”*

Let’s start our course by considering a hypothetical situation ...

A month ago, just before the first wave of pain hit, my wife and I were happily making plans to meet with our kids and grandkids at the beach. We had regularly worked out at our fitness club and seemed in very good health. We looked forward to more travel and more great times with our closest long-time friends in the years ahead.

And now the tests are back. We are sitting in the waiting room. Our doctor comes in, looks sorrowfully at us, and says to me ...

“I’m sorry to have to tell you that you have cancer. And it’s a very aggressive type of cancer that is unlikely to respond well to treatment. In truth, you have only months to live and they will not be pleasant ones. You may through various treatment programs be able to prolong your death for a short while, but you will not be able to prolong your life.”

Our world is shattered.

So, what are we to do with such devastating news? What should we do?

Suffering and Death, especially if they come upon us suddenly and unexpectedly, bring up a number of varied reactions and complex questions – even for strong Christians

- 1. Why did God do this to me?*
- 2. How can I endure suffering such as this – suffering that is long-term, suffering that is painfully-debilitating, suffering that is accompanied by nausea and other very discomfoting maladies, suffering that necessitates treatments that rob one of modesty, personal dignity, perceived self-worth and the simple enjoyments of life?*
- 3. How should I view death, “the last enemy”, when we come face to face, when he is real and near and not just far off and vague?*
- 4. Why would a sovereign God who decrees and ordains all that comes to pass decree pain, suffering and death into His creation in the first place?*
- 5. Why do good and decent people seem to suffer the most while so many wicked people prosper and enjoy great health?*
- 6. How could a good, caring, and loving God so severely afflict a man like Job, a man whom God Himself had just called “blameless and upright, and one who feared God and shunned evil” – just to prove a point to Satan?*

Lastly, we have what we might call the “Big Four Questions” of Pain, Suffering, and Death

- 7. I would never intentionally inflict short-term, much less long-term, pain and suffering on my children. So, why would a good, loving, and caring God do it to His children?*
- 8. Is suffering always a sign of God’s judgment?*
- 9. Does God sometimes make us suffer just “for His glory alone”? That just doesn’t sound right to me. At least it doesn’t sound very loving or caring.*

10. *What about our five pages of questions and concerns raised by Job? (Paper 4)*

And, as we said, to make matters worse, these questions are often accompanied by the appearances of and bouts with depression, despair, anxiety, momentary panic attacks, and doubts of God's love for us and of our own salvation.

For all these reasons, the ten questions above must be squarely faced and answered if we are to achieve any lasting good out of our course.

We should point out that this will be a “solid food” course

What do we mean by a “solid food” course?

The author of Hebrews sternly admonishes believers for being content to remain “milk”, or baby, Christians and not progressing on to the “solid food” of sound doctrine ...

“For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food. For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.” (Hebrews 5:12-14)

As we saw above, this class will involve answering a number of hard and complex questions. In doing so, we will, by necessity, be dealing with “solid food”.

So, if you want to get as much as possible out of the course you can do some work on your own – like reading the book of *Job* over the next few weeks, starting today, meditating and taking notes on it. In short, you should try to fully engage the course so as to, as the author of Hebrews says, “have [your] senses exercised to discern both good and evil.”

One way this course should be especially helpful is that ...

... many of the most *intellectually tormenting* aspects that arise during prolonged times of physical pain and suffering and approaching death are related to misunderstandings and misapprehensions about the “true nature” of God and the “true nature” of His love for us.

Indeed, we would submit that a “correct understanding” of the “true nature” of “God’s inner core being” and of the “true nature” of His “goodness” and “love” for us are the *Hermeneutical* (i.e., interpretative and illuminating) *Keys* to comprehending and

understanding the answers to the “*common thread*” that runs through all ten of our questions and concerns listed above.

That “*correct understanding*” is what we will be seeking in this course.

Throughout our Course it is very important for you to understand that ...

Christianity Occupies the Intellectual High Ground

Though Christianity and the Bible are very simple in laying out the necessary basics of one’s salvation, Christianity is a thinking person’s religion that occupies the intellectual and philosophical high ground. We have already seen the author of Hebrews state that Christians should always be learning and growing in knowledge and doctrine, and should never be afraid or reluctant to tackle any question.

The biggest lie spread about Christianity today, one that we need to correct and overcome before proceeding any further, is that the Christian faith is somehow anti-intellectual and contrary to or incompatible with reason or rationality. We see this everywhere in social media and on college campuses.

This is simply a lie. I would point out that ...

When speaking of “reasonableness” and “rationality”

... we should always remember that all three members of the Christian Trinity tell us that we are to use, not set aside, our “*reason*” and our “*minds*”:

We see God the Father, bidding us, through the prophet Isaiah, to ...

“Come now, and let us reason together” (Isaiah 1:18).

We see many individual Proverbs, of whom God the Holy Spirit is the ultimate Author, commanding us to ... “Get wisdom! Get understanding!” (Proverbs 4:5)

Indeed, the book of Proverbs itself personifies “*Wisdom*” as a woman calling “*simple ones*” unto herself for instruction and tells us that it was specifically written to help us ...

*“To know wisdom and instruction,
To perceive the words of understanding,
To receive the instruction of wisdom,
Justice, judgment, and equity” (Proverbs 1:2-3)*

We note that God the Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, responded to the question “*Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?*” ... with ...

“You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and great commandment.” (Matthew 22:37-38)

So, according to the Lord Jesus Christ, among the requirements of “*the first and great commandment*” is that the Christian is to love God “*with all your mind*”.

In fact, the Apostle John in the introductory chapter of his gospel uses the Greek word “*Logos*”, a word which can itself be translated as ‘*logic*’ or ‘*reason*’, to describe Jesus Christ as “*the Word*” which brings “*light*” into the world ...

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it.” (John 1:1-5)

It is not Christians who do not “*comprehend*”, but those who live and dwell in “*darkness*.”

And so, far from conflicting with wisdom or reason or rationality, we have all three members of the Christian Trinity calling us unto it.

Indeed, the Bible itself tells us that ...

“All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.” (2 Timothy 3:16-17)

... that one of the four reasons given (and the first one listed) that Scripture itself was given to us was for “*doctrine*” – and that, if the Christian wants to be “*complete*” and “*thoroughly equipped*” to counsel and minister both to himself and others, he had better pursue it. “*Doctrine*” is really nothing more than a very helpful statement of Biblical principles, a statement of what we believe the Bible teaches. We will build our “*doctrine*” of pain, suffering and death throughout this course.

Lastly, we note that the Bible itself contains a large section of what is commonly referred to as “*Wisdom Literature*” – the books of ...

Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Solomon –

... all of which are majestic in their scope, and which, along with the grand and eloquent exhortations of the great Prophets of Israel and the uplifting and awe-inspiring sayings and teachings of the Lord Jesus Christ, stand far above the great literature of the world and very far above all other so-called “*holy books*”.

Again: It is Christianity that occupies the Intellectual and Philosophical high ground.

Indeed, C. S. Lewis made a very interesting philosophical observation concerning pain and suffering that we can use to demonstrate our point:

In his book *The Problem of Pain*, a book which we highly recommend for you to read, C. S. Lewis asserts that only Christianity can logically raise a “*problem*” with pain and suffering, because only Christianity sets forth the co-existence of a good, loving, caring, merciful, personal, sovereign and all-powerful God and a world riddled with pain, suffering, and death at the same time.

This “*problem*” ...

If there is a good and loving God, why is there so much evil, suffering, and pain in the world?

... is the most commonly stated objection against Christianity by skeptics.

Perhaps John Stuart Mill, a well-known 19th century English philosopher, summed it up best

“If God desires there to be evil in the world, then He is not good. If He does not desire there to be evil, yet evil exists, then He is not omnipotent. Thus, if evil exists God is either not loving or not all-powerful. Evil casts a shadow over God’s love and power. This is no small dilemma, and answers to it are exceedingly difficult.”

As we are seeking to develop an appreciation for “*solid food*” thinking, we cannot let Mills’ assertions go unanswered and would reply ...

First, that the Major Premise “*If a good, loving and omnipotent God exists, there would be no evil in the world*” is not a provable statement, but a mere opinion that must itself be taken (dare we say it?) on ‘faith’. There is no inherent contradiction or logically demanded mutual exclusivity between the existence of evil and the existence of a good, loving and omnipotent God at the same time.

Second, as virtually all philosophers define evil against the backdrop of “the good” (“*evil*” being a negation of “*the good*”), how, in an Epistemological sense, absent God, can the skeptic even know that there is such a thing as “evil” in the first place. [Note: *Epistemology* is the study of the theory of knowledge and how we can know things.]

So the skeptic has two problems to face ...

First, how, without a higher authority, can he *authoritatively* define “*the good*” to be anything beyond his own mere opinion

Second, without an authoritatively definable “good”, “evil” itself must remain an undefinable illusion that can really be nothing more than the differing and ever-shifting opinions of mere men, hardly the stuff of proper logic and reason.

Mills’s question is an example of why Christians should never suppress, dismiss, or be apologetic for anything God says or does – but should politely respond with both “*apologetic*” and “*polemic*” answers.

“APOLOGETIC” answers don’t “apologize” for anything, but rather make a *defense* of Christian beliefs by rationally and logically answering questions about it.

The Apostle Peter instructs us to be ready to do this ... and tells us the manner in which we are to do it ...

“... always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear” (1Peter 3:15)

Paul also instructs us in the manner in which we are to answer those who oppose us

“And a servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient, in humility correcting those who are in opposition, if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth, and that they may come to their senses and escape the snare of the devil, having been taken captive by him to do his will.” (2 Timothy 2:24-26)

Our present course is really an Apologetics course on pain, suffering, and death.

‘POLEMICS’ makes an *aggressive refutation* of erroneous attacks and misrepresentations against Christianity, and should be handled in the same manner.

An example of a Polemical answer would be our response to the Mills’ quote above.

So ... Back to our Course

What are the Goals of our Course? What do we hope to accomplish?

We hope to help you develop what Brian Cosby, the author of *Suffering and Sovereignty – John Flavel and the Puritans on Afflictive Providence*, another book we highly recommend, calls ...

“... a robust theology of suffering – one that exhibited both a right view of God’s sovereignty and a right view of God’s goodness – and held these two truths together

in a harmonious relationship as a foundation for understanding the nature, origin, and purposes of suffering, and a right response to it.” (Suffering & Sovereignty, Brian Cosby, pages x-xi)

Our course is designed to give you intellectually-satisfying answers to our Ten Questions from a Christian viewpoint, to help prepare you to successfully face suffering and death in a Christ-like manner when confronted by them, and to enable you to help others facing prolonged suffering and death to do the same.

Using Scripture, we will learn how to prepare ourselves to confront and successfully handle the times of depression, despair, anxiety and doubts of God’s love and even our own salvation that so often accompany prolonged suffering. Again, for the Christian, there is such a thing as “*suffering well*” and “*dying well*” and we want to learn how to do it.

We want to help the sufferer and the person approaching death in three ways ...

First, to help them come to a better, more uplifting, more wondrous and deeper understanding of God Himself, of the nature of His love and gracious care for them, and of His always “good” intentions and treatment of them, even in times of pain and suffering

Second, to help them resolve any false “*Whys?*” that may be troubling them ...

Third, to help them to gain spiritual solace, understanding, reassurance, comfort and relief as they endure the unendurable.

We want all sufferers, particularly long-term sufferers, to know that even if their pain and suffering should continue unabated, or even worsen, they can still ...

Experience the “*joy of their salvation*” ...

Know “*the peace of God, which passes all understanding*” ... and ...

Know the rich and wonderful blessings of *trusting in, serving, and witnessing for* God even in the midst of the most painful and difficult times of their lives.

If we should choose theme verses for our course and what we hope to get out of it, it would be for each of us to joyfully and truthfully be able to say and fully believe ...

Concerning suffering ...

“*Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him.*” (Job 13:15)

Concerning death ...

*“Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
I will fear no evil;
For You are with me;
Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.” (Psalm 23:4)*

So that you might understand where I, as the teacher and author of this course, am coming from, I would say that ...

I undertake teaching on “Suffering” with the same trepidation that C. S. Lewis described in his book *The Problem of Pain* ...

“All arguments in justification of suffering provoke bitter resentment against the author. You would like to know how I behave when I am experiencing pain, not writing books about it. You need not guess, for I will tell you; I am a great coward. But what is that to the purpose? “

Lewis mentions his thoughts about pain ...

“When I think of pain – of anxiety that gnaws like fire and loneliness that spreads out like a desert, and the heartbreaking routine of monotonous misery, or again of dull aches that blacken out our whole landscape or sudden nauseating pains that knock a man’s heart out at one blow, or pains that seem already intolerable and then are suddenly increased, of infuriating scorpion-stinging pains that startle into maniacal movement a man who seemed half dead with his previous tortures – it ‘quite o’erexcites my spirit.’ ”

I would say along with Lewis, concerning pain ...

“If I knew any way of escape I would crawl through sewers to find it. But what is the good of telling you about my feelings? You know them already: they are the same as yours.”

And, I would especially conclude with Lewis ...

“I am not arguing that pain is not painful. Pain hurts. That is what the word means. I am only trying to show that the old Christian doctrine of being made ‘perfect through suffering’ is not incredible. To prove it palatable is beyond my design.”

As a teacher on the topics of pain, suffering and death, it is also fair for you to ask of me “What has been your experience with long-term suffering and approaching death?”

I admit upfront that I have never personally experienced intense *long-term* pain and suffering and I will not pretend to understand it or what you are going through (in the same way that a man cannot fully know and understand the experience and pains of childbirth). Extended intense suffering is unique to itself. And I pray that I will never have to go through what many of you and yours have had to and are having to go through.

But though I have not undergone long-term suffering and pain myself, I have seen intense long-term pain and suffering up close in others ...

I have seen my daughter suffer long and hard over many years from serious multiple-days-long migraines, severe vertigo, and constant fibromyalgia – up to thinking at one point that she was dying and calling the Elders in to anoint her with oil

I have seen my daughter-in-law suffer long and very hard from severe burns over 20% of her body

I watched _____ (name not given) pass through many years of seriously intense pain and suffering while I was her Elder at church.

But, again, I have only *observed* long-term intense suffering in others and I know that “seeing” is not “experiencing”.

But even with that being the case, I have gone to God’s infallible and all-wise word to get the answers to our ten questions and to learn how we should approach prolonged pain and suffering and approaching death. The answers and thoughts given herein are His, not mine.

For myself, I will say again that I, like Lewis, hate pain and suffering and will do virtually anything to get rid of it. I can only hope and pray that if I ever do have to experience intense long-term suffering, that, by God’s grace, I will remember, review, and with His help, abide by the thoughts, actions, and principles learned in this course, for, again, they are His thoughts and actions, not mine.

Concerning facing approaching death, I did have an experience when I was a young husband and father of being told that I had a dread disease and would only live a year (this went on for about nine months) – and I have in the last five years seriously thought at one point that I was in the process of drowning. So I do know a little bit about facing death.

And so, back to the topic of “suffering” itself ...

With respect to “Suffering”, we need to point out that there are actually TWO kinds of pain and suffering:

There is the PHYSICAL pain and suffering with which we are all familiar ...

And there is also INTELLECTUAL pain and suffering which can itself be intensely painful and which can also induce physical problems and complications as well.

The Bible refers to Intellectual suffering as having a “*broken spirit*” ...

*“A merry heart does good, like medicine,
But a broken spirit dries the bones.” (Proverbs 17:22)*

*“The spirit of a man will sustain him in sickness,
But who can bear a broken spirit?” (Proverbs 18:14)*

People experiencing prolonged intense suffering very often come to face intellectual suffering as well. Indeed, we will see Job cry out in the midst of his suffering ...

“My spirit is broken.” (Job 17:1)

“Intellectual” suffering comes in different forms ...

Some Intellectual Suffering arises from family issues ...

One has lost a child ... another has a “*prodigal*” child or children ... one has lost a beloved marriage partner of many decades through death ... another has to endure watching their beloved spouse enter into and go through the indignities and forgetfulness of dementia ... one has had a beloved wife or husband who has left them for another ... another worries about what will happen to their spouse when they are gone ... and, sadly, some have had physically or sexually abusive parents or relatives ...

Some Intellectual Suffering arises from friends and associates ...

One has suffered cruel betrayal or misuse by those who were close friends for years ... another has long endured unearned and undeserved mockery and ridicule ... one has been untruthfully slandered ... another has endured contempt from others by their purposeful ignoring of them

Some Intellectual Suffering arises from business situations ...

One has had severe business reverses, losing all ... Another is being persecuted for their faith and passed over for promotion, etc.

But the worst and most painful Intellectual Suffering of all is that which is related to our doubts, misapprehensions and erroneous thoughts about God ...

This would involve such issues and uncertainties as ...

Am I really saved? ... What will happen to me when I die? ... Have I committed the “unpardonable sin”? ... How can I be a Christian when I must struggle so hard against sin in general and particular sins in particular? ... Is God angry with me and punishing me for something I have done? ... Why does God seem to hate me? ... Why has He become my enemy? ... When thinking about my approaching death, I can’t think of anything except certain terrible things that I have done – things like having multiple abortions and having done some really cruel and despicable things to others in my past and _____ (you fill in the blank).

We will consider both *Physical* and *Intellectual* suffering in our course.

Our study of the Biblical book of *Job* [Paper 4] will give us a deep, personal, and up-close look at the *intellectual* pain and suffering of the “*broken spirit*” that so often confronts a devout believer enduring intense long-term *physical* suffering.

Returning to our earlier HYPOTHETICAL SITUATION

When bad health news and/or the specter of near-term death suddenly strikes with the force of a sledge hammer, and the devil concurrently begins or intensifies a relentless campaign to destroy any comfort that we might have or any witness that we might try to make by bringing all the above intellectual worries and questions before us – the best way we can successfully handle it is to BE PREPARED BEFOREHAND!

Unless we understand and immerse ourselves in the Biblical truths that deal with prolonged pain, suffering and death and unless we come to understand the true nature of God and His love for us, we will likely have a rough time of it when prolonged suffering and approaching death appear on our doorstep.

We need to be prepared beforehand for two reasons –

First, it is exceedingly difficult to develop and work out a sound theological response to prolonged pain, suffering, and approaching death while going through them.

Second, as stated above, we will likely have to combat the depression, despair, anger, and doubts of God’s love and of our own salvation that so often accompanies the onset of prolonged suffering and approaching death.

But, if we are sufficiently prepared beforehand, we can overcome our initial innate tendencies of fear, perplexity and despair and instead experience the rich and wonderful blessings and comforts of trusting, glorifying and serving God throughout our suffering up to and through the very end.

So that we might be *Prepared Beforehand*, we will, throughout our course, go to Scripture and take “long, in-depth looks” at

1. The nature, existence and purpose of pain, suffering, and even death itself ...
2. The nature of both regenerate and unregenerate man ...
3. The nature, inner being, and core character of God Himself ...
4. The nature of God’s love for us and how it might differ from “kindness” ...

Regarding our four “long in-depth looks”, we have seven Biblical truths that you should not only believe, but know why you believe them.

They are ...

1. **God is a good, loving, caring, merciful, all-powerful, and all-wise God**

... whose ordaining of both suffering and death is perfectly Biblical, understandable, logical, and reasonable.
2. **God is infinitely perfect in all of His attributes, including wisdom, which wisdom may at times differ greatly from our smaller finite wisdom.**

God Himself tells us ...

*“‘For My thoughts are not your thoughts,
Nor are your ways My ways,’ says the LORD.
‘For as the heavens are higher than the earth,
So are My ways higher than your ways,
And My thoughts than your thoughts.’” (Isaiah 55: 8-9)*

This is very important to keep in mind as we deal with prolonged pain and suffering.

Perhaps we will someday, before our deaths, know the reason for our present personal sufferings. Perhaps we won’t. But whatever the reason might or might not be, we should exercise faith in Him, trust Him, and have confidence in Him and His goodness towards us – not only because He is all-wise but also because He is worthy of it.

3. **We belong to God body and soul.**

We are His by right of creation and, if a Christian, we are additionally His by act of purchase at a great price.

Though God is good, loves us dearly, and is always motivated in all that He does concerning us to achieving our highest and greatest good, He has never promised us freedom from sorrow and suffering and we are not to presume otherwise. We must also remember that God is under no obligation to us and owes us no explanation for anything He does.

Again, we may never know the particular “Whys?” of our case. But He does. And that should be sufficient for our peace and joy. We can, of course, continue to pray for relief, but we should also trust Him and be willing to accept His answer in the matter, because, again, He is worthy of our trust.

4. Suffering is never sent as a punishment from God to His children for something they have done.

No. Jesus has already been punished and paid the full price for all of your sins on the cross, and God, being a just God, would never require or make you to be punished in any way for any of them again. As we will see, any and all of God’s actions towards His children involving pain and suffering are always either corrective or intended for their personal growth in sanctification, or both, but are never punitive in nature.

5. God is sovereign over all things, including pain and suffering.

Suffering is never random.

We often hear it said that “*just as it rains on the just and the unjust, bad things happen to good people simply because we live in a fallen world*”. This is not true. It is true that pain, suffering, and death are with us because of the fall. But there is no randomness or chance in the delegation of pain and suffering to either God’s children or to the reprobate.

The Bible repeatedly tells us of the complete and total sovereignty of God over all pain, suffering and death:

God Himself tells us that it is He that makes the “*mute ... deaf ... blind*”

“So the Lord said to him, ‘Who has made man’s mouth? Or who makes the mute, the deaf, the seeing, or the blind? Have not I, the LORD?’ (Exodus 4:11)

God declares Himself sovereign over all “*calamities*”, “*darkness*”, etc.

“If there is calamity in a city, will not the LORD have done it?” (Amos 3:6)

“I form the light and create darkness, I make peace and create calamity; I, the LORD, do all these things.” (Isaiah 45:7)

*“Now see that I, even I, am He,
And there is no God besides Me;
I kill and I make alive,
I wound and I heal;
Nor is there any who can deliver from My hand.” (Deuteronomy 32:39)*

Because pain, suffering, and all calamities are not random, but come by the express, sovereign, permissive will and decree of God, Christians should never say silly, unbiblical things like *“My God did not do that!”* – when, in fact ... He, actually did ... *“do that”*.

The worst part of saying such a thing such as *“My God did not do that!”* is that it implies that there are forces and powers that are beyond God’s sovereign control and power.

And so we see that God is neither unaware of or surprised by any pain or suffering that comes into our lives. Whatever happens to a Christian in the area of pain and suffering comes through the direct, sovereign, decretive, and permissive will of God and not by fate, accident, chance, or bad luck. God is sovereign over all things and there are no bad “random” effects from the fall, no accidents, no bad luck, no terrible twists of fate. All things that happen to us happen by His permissive will and are neither unknown nor a surprise to Him.

[As we will later see, there is much comfort to be had in this knowledge.]

Our sixth Biblical truth is that ...

6. **Anything that God does “for His own glory” concerning His children is also, at the same time, done for His children’s highest personal good.**

God loves His children so much that His glory and His children’s personal good are inextricably bound up with each other. They cannot be separated and always occur together. An increase in one will always cause a corresponding increase in the other.

We will look at this in much greater detail later.

[Another book which we highly recommend, which covers this very topic, and which we will use in this course, is “God’s Passion for His Glory” by John Piper, which includes Jonathan Edwards’ grand Essay ‘The End for Which God Created the World.’]

Our final Biblical Truth, Truth # 7, is probably the hardest point to believe when going through prolonged pain and suffering

- 7. We would submit that when your life is over and you stand in the presence of God and see the wonderful tapestry that He has woven of your life and how He has used events in your life to glorify Himself and to minister to others ...**

... you will, like Job, stand there in utter awe, wonder, amazement, and admiration, and would not change one single minute of your sufferings on earth, but will instead only be eternally thankful that you were deemed worthy to suffer with Christ and be a blessing to so many others.

We will cover all seven of these points throughout our course.

Let’s pause here to answer a couple of common questions concerning pain, suffering, and death ...

First, “Does all this mean that mean that my present health condition is necessarily a ‘good’ thing?”

No. Not all things that happen, or happen to us, are “good” things. But it does mean that whatever has happened and whatever condition you are in, God is well aware of it and will bring ultimate “good” out of it for you, either now, or later, or both. Paul tells us in Romans 8:28 ...

“And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.” (Romans 8:28)

God will often use the pain and suffering that comes into our lives for various redemptive, corrective, or instructional purposes.

He also sometimes allows the evil actions of men for His own good purposes. Two clear examples of God bringing good out of the evil actions of men are ...

Joseph’s brothers selling him into slavery ...

“But as for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive.” (Genesis 50:20)

The crucifixion of our Lord ...

“Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested by God to you by miracles, wonders, and signs which God did through Him in your midst, as you yourselves also know – Him being delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death” (Acts 2:22-23)

We note that though God uses the evil actions of men for His own good purposes, it does not in any way excuse or ameliorate the guilt or responsibility of the individuals for those actions.

Second, “*Since all things from my affliction are working to my good, should I stop praying to be delivered from my affliction, whatever it is?*”

No. We can and should continue to pray long and hard to be delivered from painful and deadly afflictions. But we must pray according to the example of our Lord, who on the night of His betrayal, when facing the terrible and excruciating physical pain of scourging and crucifixion, and the far worse spiritual pain and torment of being branded with our sins, forsaken by His Father, and suffering an eternity of hell in our place, prayed ...

“Father, if it is Your will, take this cup away from Me; nevertheless not My will, but Yours, be done.” (Mark 22:42)

You mentioned earlier that there is a “*common thread*” that runs through all ten of our questions. “*What is it?*”

The “*common thread*” question that runs through all ten of our questions concerns the very core nature of God Himself – the inner core nature that drives all of His dealings with us, His adopted children. Boiled down to its essence, the “*common thread*” question is ...

What is God really like?

We will, throughout our course, approach looking at that “*common thread*” through exploring three topics that are crucial to understanding the answers to our Ten Questions.

Our three topics may seem to be simple on the surface, but in actuality are much more complex and interrelated than they first appear. They are ...

1. *Is God really “good” in all that He does?*
2. *Does God really “love” His children and in what way?*
3. *Is God really “worthy” of our faith and trust?*

To help you to truly and sincerely answer “*Yes!*” to all three of these questions (and, just as important, to know and understand why the answer is “*Yes*”) is the main goal of our course.

We will spend a great deal of time looking at each of them.

But even though answering and understanding all of our questions will take time, it will be time very well and very profitably spent – for, as stated earlier, we hold that a correct understanding of the true nature of God’s inner core “*Goodness*” and “*Love*” are the *Hermeneutical* (interpretative and illuminating) *Keys* to comprehending and understanding the answers to all ten of our questions and concerns listed above.

The answers will also give you a more uplifting and wonderful view of God Himself and of His loving, caring, gracious, and always good, but never punitive, dealings with His children.

So – Let us move on to our next Topic ...

The Many “Whys?” of Suffering and Death [Papers 2, 3, and 4]

Soli Deo Gloria

[Glory to God Alone]