

WitnessKit Bible Study
Class 3
The Power of God and
the Problem of
Suffering

Jeremiah 32:17, 37b-41

Jeremiah prayed: “Ah, Lord GOD! Behold, Thou hast made the heavens and the earth by Thy great power and by Thine outstretched arm! **Nothing is too difficult for Thee.**”

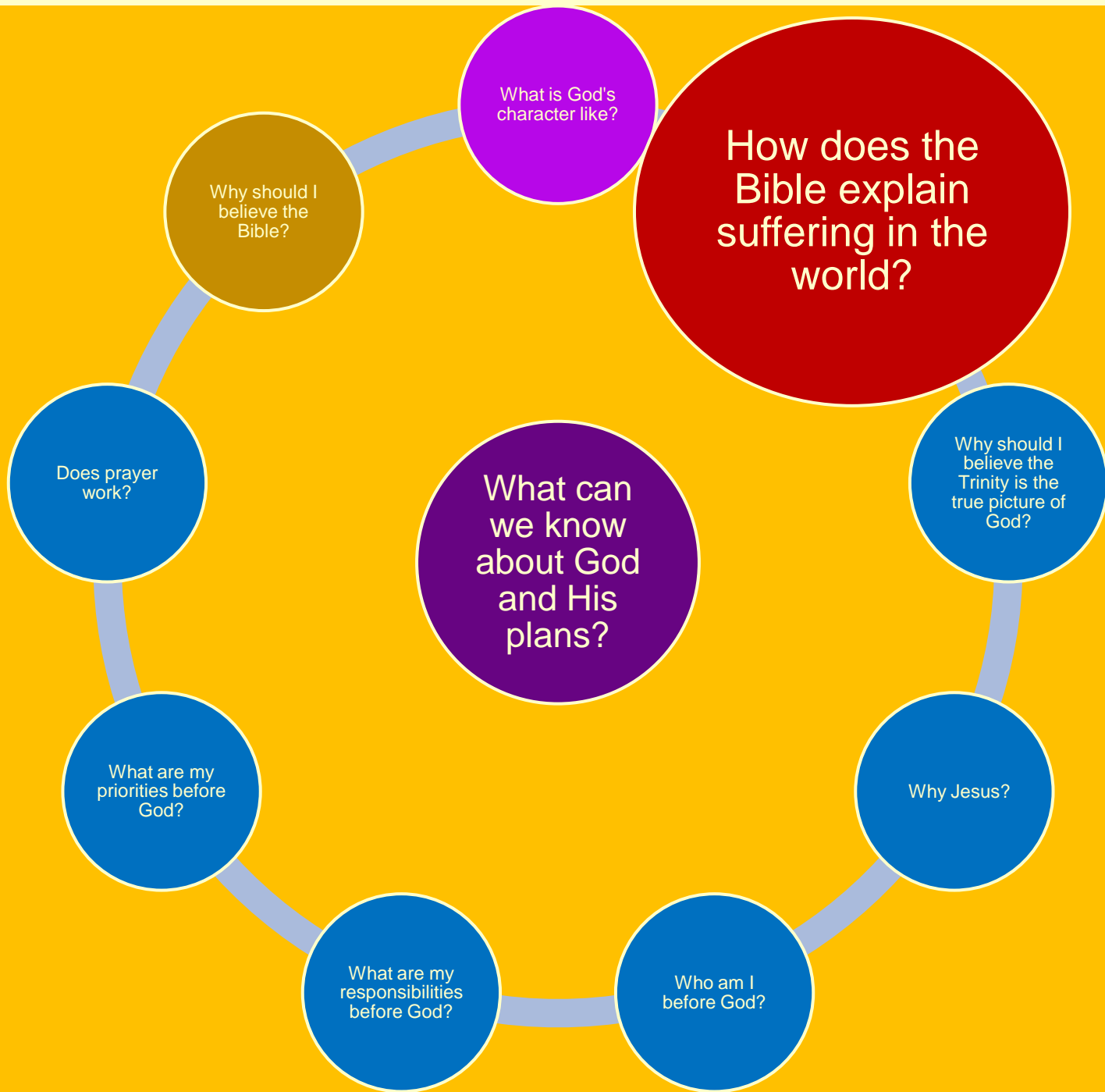
The LORD answered: “I will bring them back to this place and make them dwell in safety. And they shall be My people, and I will be their God; and I will give them one heart and one way, that they may fear Me always, for their own good, and for the good of their children after them.

Jeremiah 32:17, 37b-41

And I will make an everlasting covenant with them that I will not turn away from them, to do them good;

and I will put the fear of Me in their hearts so that they will not turn away from Me.

And I will rejoice over them to do them good,
and I will faithfully plant them in this land with all My heart and with all My soul.”



Sometimes

People take a deterministic view of God's kingly authority because His power attributes are so great. His power is very important to understand and trust. His power is a great help toward confidence in prayer.

His perfectly righteous character is the immutable foundation for everything—even more foundational than His power.

His power is marvelous and comforting BECAUSE His character is perfect and filled with **steadfast love.**

Micah 7:18-19

¹⁸ Who is a God like you, pardoning iniquity and passing over transgression for the remnant of his inheritance? He does not retain his anger forever, **because he delights in steadfast love.** ¹⁹ He will again have compassion on us; he will tread our iniquities underfoot. You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea. ²⁰ You will show faithfulness to Jacob and **steadfast love** to Abraham, as you have sworn to our fathers from the days of old. (ESV)

We can see God's priorities.

- I Corinthians 13: 1-3. ¹ Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal. ² And though I have *the gift of prophecy*, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. ³ And though I bestow all my goods to feed *the poor*, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing. (NKJV)




Here we see power and love
contrasted.

Which one is more important?

It is more important for us,
and it is more important for God.

There is a pitfall in placing God's power attributes as more important than His Character.



When studying theology we should ALWAYS remember that God's righteousness is more important even than His power.

His power is more visible to us through the things He has created. Believing in His righteousness requires a step of faith because we live in a fallen world.

The troubles of the world sometimes veil His goodness, and sometimes motivate us to seek for His goodness.

Sometimes

- People think they must honor God's power by assuming that He causes everything that happens, and that both good and evil come from Him. (Sometimes the Bible describes natural calamity as evil—due to the fallen nature of creation—but that is different from MORAL EVIL. God does not cause moral evil.)
- The idea that both good and moral evil come from God is called determinism—assuming that God determines everything that happens and wants it to happen that way—that He is puppet-master and nobody has real choices.

Determinism is NOT Sovereignty

- The Bible is very clear that determinism is not the correct view. When Jesus instructed us to pray “Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven,” He was implying that what happens on earth and what God wants to happen are not always the same.
- When God gave people choices, part of being created in His image, those choices are real. They have real consequences.
- God sets limits on choices, by giving us rules that prevent evil choices, by guiding people who are willing to follow His good plans, and sometimes by intervening in the way things happen.

The Bible is also clear

- That this is a complicated area of discussion. All kinds of factors enter the equation. God's permissive will is sometimes a motivator for good for other people, even if one person makes a terrible decision—the power of a bad example & consequences.
- The Bible has a promise—that God **ALWAYS** causes good for those who love Him, even when events are bad. Romans 8:28 promises that “**God causes all things to work together for good for those who love Him, those who are called according to His purpose.**”
- The entire chapter sets that promise in the context of suffering in this world.

Every Sin

goes against God's good and perfect will, but is a part of His permissive will. He allows decisions to be made by humans that He does not WANT them to make. Those decisions are real. People are accountable for each one.

- Romans 12:1-2 indicates that we must seek to understand God's good and perfect and acceptable will for our own lives. Drifting along will not be enough to stay on His best path.

So we want to try to understand

How suffering can be allowed by God, and yet not reflect His character. We want to look at His power and the question of suffering in the same class.

We can fear and trust God more realistically for our own good by meditating on

Characteristics of God's Power

His POWER attributes.

1. **His Sovereignty,**
2. His Omniscience,
3. His Omnipresence,
4. His Omnipotence,
5. His Eternal Nature,
6. His Infinite Being,
7. His Wisdom, and
8. His Creativity.

Sovereignty: God is King.

I Timothy 6:15-16

He who is the blessed and only Sovereign,
the King of kings and Lord of lords,
¹⁶ who alone has immortality,
who dwells in unapproachable light,
whom no one has ever seen or can see.
To Him be honor and eternal dominion.

Amen. (ESV)

God's Sovereignty

- Encompasses a number of things. God has the right as King to make the rules. He has that moral right because He is totally GOOD. He has the power because He is almighty.
- He has the right to demand our loyalty as our King. He has the right to demand our good actions because authority belongs to Him. He has the right to judge our actions, and make decisions over life and death. He has the right to declare our ultimate destiny based upon His good character and our decisions.

God's Sovereignty

- He is the Ultimate Authority over everything. He is King of Kings and LORD of all Lords.
- He has the final decision over events—not like a puppet-master, but as King over the universe He created and over people He created in His image—and whom He loves.
- He is the GOOD KING.

Sovereignty: God is King.

1 Samuel 8:7 ⁷ And the LORD said to Samuel, "Heed the voice of the people in all that they say to you; for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me, that I should not reign over them. (NKJV)

The people asked for a human king to lead them. God was upset because they were rejecting Him as King. When God enters our lives in the Person of His Holy Spirit, He enters as King. That is Who He is.

Sovereignty: God is King.

Psalm 2:6 ⁶ "Yet I have set My King On My holy hill of Zion." (NKJV)

Psalm 5:2 ² Give heed to the voice of my cry, My King and my God, For to You I will pray. (NKJV)

Because God is King, we can pray to Him and He is able to act. He has kingly right and authority to act upon the world He created. Because our choices are real and our prayers are real, His actions in response to our prayers make a difference.

Sovereignty: God is King.

Whether He acts or not, He is still King.

The three Judean men in Nebuchadnezzar's court who refused to bow to the idol were correct when they said God is able to deliver them from King Nebuchadnezzar's furnace of fire, and they **ALSO** were right to say, "But **IF** He does **NOT**, we still will not bow."

God is the King who has the ultimate decision about how to answer prayer. He has the wisdom and character to make the right decision.

Sovereignty: God is King.

- Psalm 29:10 ¹⁰ The LORD sat *enthroned* at the Flood, And the LORD sits as King forever. (NKJV)
- Psalm 47:7, ⁷ For God *is* the King of all the earth; Sing praises with understanding.
⁸ God reigns over the nations; God sits on His holy throne. (NKJV)

□ Psalm 24:1-10 The earth *is* the LORD's, and all its fullness, The world and those who dwell therein. ² For He has founded it upon the seas, And established it upon the waters. ³ Who may ascend into the hill of the LORD? Or who may stand in His holy place? ⁴ He who has clean hands and a pure heart, Who has not lifted up his soul to an idol, Nor sworn deceitfully. ⁵ He shall receive blessing from the LORD, **And righteousness** from the God of his salvation. ⁶ This *is* Jacob, the generation of those who seek Him, Who seek Your face. Selah⁷ Lift up your heads, O you gates! And be lifted up, you everlasting doors! And the King of glory shall come in. ⁸ **Who *is* this King of glory? The LORD strong and mighty, The LORD mighty in battle.** ⁹ Lift up your heads, O you gates! Lift up, you everlasting doors! And the King of glory shall come in. ¹⁰ Who is this King of glory? **The LORD of hosts, He *is* the King of glory.** Selah (NKJV)

Sovereignty: God is King.

- Psalm 103:19¹⁹ The LORD has established His throne in heaven, And His kingdom rules over all. (NKJV)
- Psalm 99:4⁴ The King's strength also **loves justice**; You have established **equity**; You have executed justice and righteousness in Jacob. (NKJV)

Sovereignty: God is King.

- Psalm 98: 1-9 God is the victorious King who has made known His salvation and revealed His righteousness even among the gentile nations—and to all the ends of the earth,
- and who has remembered His lovingkindness and faithfulness to the house of Israel. He is worthy of joyful praise even by the natural world, because He will come to judge the world in righteousness.

Sovereignty: God is King.

- Psalm 119:90-91 ⁹⁰ Your faithfulness *endures* to all generations; You established the earth, and it abides. ⁹¹ They continue this day according to Your ordinances, For all *are* Your servants. (NKJV)

To what extent does God's Sovereignty reach according to this passage?

- ▣ He is Sovereign over all things—
- ▣ all generations,
- ▣ the earth
- ▣ and the ordinances of the earth,

Jeremiah 19:4-5 ⁴ "Because they have forsaken Me and made this an alien place, because they have burned incense in it to other gods whom neither they, their fathers, nor the kings of Judah have known, and have filled this place with the blood of the innocents ⁵ (they have also built the high places of Baal, to burn their sons with fire *for* burnt offerings to Baal, which I did not command or speak, nor did it come into My mind), (NKJV)

In this passage, does God's Sovereignty mean that He caused everything that happened? Does God cause sin?

ABSOLUTELY NOT. People choose to sin and when they abandon God, they can sin in ways He never even imagined—that are so far from His righteousness they have no source in His thoughts.

Sovereignty: God is King.

- Luke 7:30 ³⁰ But the Pharisees and lawyers rejected the will of God for themselves, not having been baptized by him. (meaning John the Baptist, who baptized for repentance of sins—meaning the Pharisees and lawyers refused to repent. This was absolutely NOT what God wanted them to do. God had their best interest at heart.) (NKJV)
- Does God's Sovereignty allow people to go against His purpose?
- Yes. People have real choices!

The issue of determinism

How do you reconcile Luke 7:30 and Job 42:1-2?

¹ Then Job answered the LORD and said: ² "I know that You can do everything, And that no purpose *of Yours* can be withheld from You. (NKJV)

Even when people go against God's good purpose for their own lives, His ultimate purposes will be accomplished, and not thwarted.

The issue of determinism

One of His purposes is to allow people real choices as significant beings who were made in His image, with real consequences for their choices.

So He has a permissive will—which allows people to sin,

and a good and perfect will—a plan for the very best for their lives.

People choose the path either of God's permissive will or of His good and perfect will moment by moment. Consequences follow their choices.

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God Is Omniscient.

Psalm 139:1-18 LORD, You have searched me and known *me*.² You know my sitting down and my rising up; You understand my thought afar off.³ You comprehend my path and my lying down, And are acquainted with all my ways.⁴ For *there is* not a word on my tongue, *But* behold, O LORD, You know it altogether.⁵ You have hedged me behind and before, And laid Your hand upon me.⁶ *Such* knowledge *is* too wonderful for me; It is high, I cannot *attain* it.

God Is Omniscient.

Psalm 139:1-18 ⁷ Where can I go from Your Spirit?
Or where can I flee from Your presence? ⁸ If I
ascend into heaven, You *are* there; If I make my
bed in hell, behold, You *are there*. ⁹ If I take the
wings of the morning, *And* dwell in the uttermost
parts of the sea, ¹⁰ Even there Your hand shall
lead me, And Your right hand shall hold me.

¹¹ If I say, "Surely the darkness shall fall on me,"
Even the night shall be light about me;

¹² Indeed, the darkness shall not hide from You,
But the night shines as the day; The darkness
and the light *are* both alike *to You*.

God Is Omniscient.

Psalm 139: ¹³ For You formed my inward parts; You covered me in my mother's womb. ¹⁴ I will praise You, for I am fearfully *and* wonderfully made; Marvelous are Your works, *And that* my soul knows very well. ¹⁵ My frame was not hidden from You, When I was made in secret, *And* skillfully wrought in the lowest parts of the earth.

God Is Omniscient.

Psalm 139: ¹⁶ Your eyes saw my substance, being yet unformed. And in Your book they all were written, The days fashioned for me, When *as yet there were* none of them. ¹⁷ How precious also are Your thoughts to me, O God! How great is the sum of them! ¹⁸ *If* I should count them, they would be more in number than the sand; When I awake, I am still with You. (NKJV)

Things God knows about you, according to this passage:
when you sit down, when you stand up,
your thoughts,
your path, all your ways:
your words before you say them,
your physical state, wherever you are, from here to
heaven or hell, and whether in darkness or light,
awake or asleep.

God formed you in your Mother's womb, weaving you
together wonderfully and awesomely.

God knows your future—every day of it is already written
in God's book of your life.

God knows every attitude you have and God is able to
help you have the thoughts and ways that please Him.

God Is Omniscient.

- Isaiah 46:9-10 ⁹ Remember the former things of old, For I *am* God, and *there is* no other; I *am* God, and *there is* none like Me, ¹⁰ Declaring the end from the beginning, And from ancient times *things* that are not yet done, Saying, 'My counsel shall stand, And I will do all My pleasure,' (NKJV)

Is God limited by time in His knowledge?—No.

- Does He know things about you that you do not know about yourself?
- Yes. Matthew 10:30, Luke 12:7 ³⁰ But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. (NKJV)

God Is Omniscient.

Isaiah 40:26 What is something else God knows?

The names of all the stars.

Luke 12:6 What is something else God knows and does not forget?

The life of every sparrow.

Psalms 147:5 How is God's understanding described?

infinite

Colossians 2:2-3,9 What is hidden in Messiah?

- *all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge, true wealth for us, the complete description of God in bodily form,*

I Corinthians 13:1-3 Is omniscience—all knowledge—reason enough by itself for worship? What is better than omniscience? What is the source of that characteristic?

- *Omniscience is only worthy if it is filled with love. Love is better than infinite knowledge. The source of true love is God's love—His perfectly righteous goodness. So God's omniscience is worthy of our worship and praise because He IS filled with love.*

God Is Omniscient.

If you had to decide between worshipping a deterministic god who had all the power attributes and whose character could not be known,
or worshipping the God described in the Bible, with all the power attributes and **TOTAL GOODNESS**,
which would be the right choice?
the God described in the Bible.

God Is Omniscient.

Joshua 24:14-15, Genesis 28:12-22, 48:15-16 Can we make such a choice and are we responsible to choose well?

- Yes we can choose.
- Yes, we are responsible to choose well.

One additional note about God's Omniscience

In His Omniscience, God knew in advance the terrible choices that would be made in Jeremiah 19:4-5, where God said such choices “never even entered His mind.” This on a literal level appears contradictory. But the actions they took did not have a source from God's good mind. So God can know about things He hates without being a source for those things.

His judgment rightly fell upon the people of that era because of their terrible cruelty toward innocents. That principle appears throughout.

Whenever

Evil becomes so pervasive that innocent life is not protected in law,

God intervenes in judgment. Often that judgment is seen as His removal of protection during war—with terrible suffering that produces. Isaiah 22:8 describes this form of judgment.

Abraham Lincoln, in his second inaugural address, stated that the American Civil War was such a judgment from God—because of the cruelty of slavery. Abraham Lincoln held out forgiveness to those willing to receive it.

This principle

- Occurs without partiality in the Bible. Whenever any nation reaches that level of wrong thinking and action and law, the nation risks having God's protection taken away. Our world today is FILLED with evil disregard for human life—think about the life issues such as abortion and euthanasia, or principles of warfare that involve targeting civilians and non-combatants, which rightly are called terrorism, or actions of governments that are callous and cruel toward human life. God is not lenient about these matters. They carry a cost. We and the whole world NEED His protection.

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Omnipresence: God is everywhere at once.

We already looked at Psalm 139:7-12. Where can a person go that God is not? **No place. Not even hell.**

Can God be contained in space?

1 Kings 8:27-30 ²⁷ But will God indeed dwell on the earth? **Behold, heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain You.** How much less this temple which I have built! ²⁸ Yet regard the prayer of Your servant and his supplication, O LORD my God, and listen to the cry and the prayer which Your servant is praying before You today: ²⁹ that Your eyes may be open toward this temple night and day,

Omnipresence: God is everywhere at once.

toward the place of which You said, 'My name shall be there,' that You may hear the prayer which Your servant makes toward this place.
³⁰ And may You hear the supplication of Your servant and of Your people Israel, when they pray toward this place. Hear in heaven Your dwelling place; and when You hear, forgive.
(NKJV)

God can hear our prayers everywhere **because He is Omnipresent**. Praying toward the temple symbolized the sacrificial payment for sins that God organized there.

Omnipresence: God is everywhere at once.

Can God be contained in space?

No. But He can send His Spirit to indwell locations in a special way, such as the ancient Temple and such as the temple of our bodies if we have repented of our sins, received Jesus' atonement for those sins, and invited Him into our lives.

This implies the possibility of communication from Him—with freedom from sin opening the way to receiving His thoughts, often by remembering His word at appropriate moments.

Omnipresence: God is everywhere at once.

Jeremiah 23:24 Where is God located?

the entire heavens and earth.

1 Timothy 6:16 How is God's location described?

dwelling in unapproachable light.

Psalms 88:1-18 I believe this Psalm describes the emotional side of Hell. What is different about God's omnipresence there compared to this life?

a sense of being forgotten by Him,

silence from Him,

darkness and a sense of His wrath.

Omnipresence: God is everywhere at once.

- Psalm 5:4 We often describe heaven as a place where no evil is allowed. In what way is God's dwelling place different from His omnipresence in hell?
- His dwelling place will be a place of open communication with Him, whereas hell is silent and that world is veiled from His face.
- In heaven, we will see our God as He is. We will be like Him there, according to 1 John 3:2, making us able to see Him as He is. In John 14:9, Jesus said that when we see Him we see the Father.

God's Omnipresence

- The topic of God's Omnipresence impinges upon the topic of the Trinity. The Holy Spirit is described as God's localized Presence—dwelling in the temple in the Hebrew Scriptures even though heaven and the highest heaven could not contain God; Indwelling believing humans after the Day of Pentecost in Acts. Messiah is God with Us, Immanuel. In Him we see Deity in human form.
- Our one Infinite Omnipresent God in His 3 Persons: sometimes shown as Persons through location.

Omnipresence: God is everywhere at once.

The fact that God is everywhere at once lends support to the idea of ONE God, rather than multiple limited gods.

One Infinite Eternally existing God fills heaven and earth and time and eternity.

This does not negate the Trinity, which implies that He is a complicated One.

The Universe is Not Infinite.

- So God's Omnipresence extends beyond the universe—to infinity. We will learn mysteries beyond the level that our minds could now grasp when we enter the realm of eternity. *“Eye has not seen nor ear heard, neither has entered the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him.”* 1
Corinthians 2:9
- The Bible describes God's understanding as infinite. Because God is Spirit—not bound by physical limitations—He Himself can be infinite.

Omnipresence: God is everywhere at once.

Because God Himself is infinite,
His power is also infinite.

Creation reinforces this idea that He is infinite,
with the vast domains of the universe and the
intricate details of the microscopic world—which
then becomes more ethereal as we peer further
into the smallness of elementary particles.

The findings of particle physics are not what we
would expect. The descriptions of our infinite
God are similarly wonderful and unexpected.

Omnipresence: God is everywhere at once.

Because God Himself is infinite,
His power is also infinite.

Logic extends validity to the truths expressed in
Scripture. We would not know God's power
attributes without communication from Him in
the Bible, but logic is consistent with the
amazing truths. The more we learn of science,
the more awesome God appears.

Omnipresence: God is everywhere at once.

Some of the seeming paradoxes or contradictions of God's omnipresence are answered by the Trinity. God the Father cannot be seen, dwelling in unapproachable light in heaven. God the Son will be seen face to face when we are in His presence in eternity. God the Holy Spirit dwells in specific places such as the ancient temple, providing a communication opportunity for humans who seek God, even though we cannot see Him.

Omnipresence: God is everywhere at once.

There will be differences in our ability to see God when we are in heaven versus here. Moses was only allowed to see God's back when God showed him His glory. On the Mount of Transfiguration, Peter, James, and John saw Jesus' glory for a brief time. 1 John 3:2 says we will be able to see Him as He is in heaven because we will be changed—made like Him. We will have to wait to find out exactly what that means.

Omnipresence: God is everywhere at once.

Materialist atheists often claim that the physical universe is all that exists. They then have difficulty believing that human beings have souls, attributing all our mental processes to brain activity alone—electrical signals and chemical reactions.

Yet we have **consciousness**, which is not a typical characteristic of **a chemical reaction**.

We laugh at people who talk to plants, because we know that consciousness is not typical of inanimate life. Yet the materialist expects chemistry to have mind as long as it is brain chemistry.

Omnipresence: God is everywhere at once.

The Bible makes a totally different claim—that God is Spirit, and we were created in His image, and that our souls are real and eternal.

We cannot see God. We cannot see each other's souls. Yet both are real.

In fact, our souls are MORE enduringly real than the physical universe. Even though we look frail, we WILL last. Only the physical wears out. 2 Corinthians 4:7 describes our souls in communion with God as treasure in earthen vessels.

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God is Omnipotent. He is totally powerful.

Psalm 115:3 What does this say God does? What are the boundaries on that?

- He does whatever He pleases. The boundaries are the goodness of His character—God does not do moral evil.

Job 42:1-2 What can God do?
all things.

Luke 1:37 What is impossible with God?

- Nothing.

God is Omnipotent. He is totally powerful.

- The problem of suffering intersects this attribute of God. God allows terrible suffering in this world. He has the power to stop it. He ultimately has the power to stop the whole enterprise—and apocalyptic words in the Bible indicate that some time in the future He will.
- He refuses the power of treating humans like puppets on strings, choosing rather to persuade and wait for a decision than to coerce toward good. But He allows people to defend themselves against others who are choosing evil.

God is Omnipotent. He is totally powerful.

- If this life were all there is, then God's refusal to get visibly involved would **always** be unfair to someone. Because eternity is real, and this life is only momentary by comparison, God's eternal purposes are more important than bringing everything to a screeching halt. God wants everyone to repent of sins and have eternal life. That desire on His part is the guiding principle behind His decisions to intervene or not—and He sees future generations as well as the present—and He sees every human heart.

God is Omnipotent.

- Read Psalm 102 and notice that God heard the prayers of those who suffered in the holocaust. Notice also that His purposes relate to future generations, according to verse 28, and that He saw the situation in terms of eternal matters, verses 26-28. Can we understand? **No.** Can we trust Him? **Yes.** Was His desire to set free those doomed to death? **Yes.** Did He use the human actions of armies of people determined to do right to accomplish setting some free? **Yes.** Was it costly in every way? **Yes.**

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God is Eternal: From Everlasting to Everlasting

□ **Eternal Nature: God is the Ultimate Beginning, having always been alive. God always will be alive. His life extends from eternity past through eternity future.**

□ Deuteronomy 33:26-27 How is God described and how is God's power described?

God is a dwelling place. He is unique. He rides the heavens to our help. Underneath are the everlasting arms—ready to catch us, supporting our lives.

□ God's eternal nature is eternally ready to help those who seek Him.

God is Eternal: From Everlasting to Everlasting

Psalm 41:12-13, Psalm 106:47-48 Did God's eternal nature have a beginning?

□ No, He is from everlasting to everlasting.

Proverbs 8:22-36 Does the word "everlasting" include eternity past when talking about God's attributes?

Yes, His mind or wisdom preceded creation.

Isaiah 40:27-31 What promise does God's everlasting nature carry with it?

He does not become weary, and He gives His strength to us who trustfully wait for Him.

“From everlasting to everlasting”

- This phrase implies either that time is not strictly confined to the universe, or that something like time will be operational in eternity. The Bible implies sequences of events in eternity, in some of the prophecies.
- We tend to assume that time will pass in eternity as it does here, inside the universe, but it may be something amazingly different. Physics and the theory of relativity hold time and entropy and velocity as interwoven within the universe—so eternity could be exceptional in ways we cannot imagine. Thinking about God’s attributes makes room for the scientific imagination to soar.

God is Eternal: From Everlasting to Everlasting

Isaiah 55:3 What is another promise God's everlasting nature carries with it?

- An everlasting covenant for us which includes everlasting life.

Isaiah 51:6-8 What else is eternal?

- God's salvation for us and God's righteousness.

God is Eternal: From Everlasting to Everlasting

Psalm 119:89,142,160 What does this say are eternal things?

God's word, God's righteousness, Every one of God's righteous ordinances.

Jeremiah 31:3, John 17:24 What else is everlasting?

God's love, from everlasting to everlasting. God's love never fails.

I Timothy 6:15-16 How is God's eternal nature described?

as the owner of immortality.

Ecclesiastes

- Has a problematic passage about immortality. Sometimes people will use this passage to say the Bible contradicts the idea of eternal life. That is a mistake in reading the passage. Ecclesiastes is a treatise about what we can know “under the sun” limited by human reason without communication from God.

Ecclesiastes

- The passage in question brings up the fact that everyone has “eternity in their hearts.” – Ecclesiastes 3:11. In verse 17 of that passage, Solomon brings up the fact that God will JUDGE each person and deed. He then jumps in verse 19-21 to “who knows whether the breath of man ascends upward and the breath of the beast ascends downward to the earth?”
- Without any communication from God, even with eternity written on our hearts, we cannot know.

Under the sun

- The idea of judgment may make some wish for this life to be all there is.
- But God HAS communicated. He has given us many reasons to know the Bible is His book. There, He has let us know that the idea of eternity written on our hearts is a reflection of reality.
- His eternal nature can share eternity with us as a gift. He delights to do that. Every generous impulse we have is a reflection of His generosity. He gives us the kingdom GLADLY!

We can fear and trust God more realistically for our own good by meditating on

Characteristics of God's Power

His POWER attributes.

1. His Sovereignty,
2. His Omniscience,
3. His Omnipresence,
4. His Omnipotence,
5. His Eternal Nature,
6. **His Infinite Being,**
7. His Wisdom, and
8. His Creativity.

God is Infinite.

- **Infinite Being: God is not subject to limitedness.**
- Psalm 147:5 What is described as infinite in this verse?
- His understanding is infinite.
- 2 Chronicles 16:9 What territory does God's infinite nature allow Him to cover, and for what purpose?
- His eyes cover the whole earth for the purpose of strongly supporting the one whose heart is completely His.

God is Infinite.

- Matthew 25:40 What does Christ's infinite nature allow Him to do?
- He experiences everything we experience. When anyone does something to one of us, He experiences it. They do that thing to Him. He will be fair when He judges them, because He went through what they did.
- How does this compare to the description of God in Isaiah 63:7-9?
- In their affliction, He was afflicted. It is the same idea.

God is Infinite.

- Psalm 74: 16-17 How does God's infinite nature relate to the boundaries of the earth?
- God established all those boundaries.
- Jeremiah 23:23-24 These verses summarize the power attributes we have studied. **“Am I a God who is near,” declares the LORD, “And not a God far off? Can a man hide himself in hiding places so I cannot see him? Do I not fill the heavens and the earth?”**

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5. His Eternal Nature,
6. His Infinite Being,
7. **His Wisdom, and**
8. His Creativity.

God's Wisdom

- Proverbs 8:22-36 How is God's wisdom related to delight?
- God's wisdom and delight are intertwined with His creativity and with the world and humans He has created. God delights in people. Amazing!
- Isaiah 55: 6-11 How does God's wisdom compare to human wisdom?
- His wisdom is as much higher than ours as the heavens are higher than the earth. His wisdom achieves results from His word every time it goes forth.

God's Wisdom

- Daniel 2:20 Who owns wisdom?
- God.
- Job 38:36 Where does human wisdom come from?
- God's wisdom, as a gift from Him.

We can fear and trust God more realistically for our own good by meditating on

Characteristics of God's Power

His POWER attributes.

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2. His Omniscience,
3. His Omnipresence,
4. His Omnipotence,
5. His Eternal Nature,
6. His Infinite Being,
7. His Wisdom, and
8. **His Creativity.**

God is Creative.

- Genesis 1 What is the order of God's creativity described here?
- Heavens and earth, light, separation of light into day and night, separation of waters and sky, separation of sea and dry land, plants, sun, moon, stars, for seasons, days, years, and for giving light on the earth, living creatures in sea and sky, living creatures on land. People in the image of God, both male and female.

God is Creative.

- Psalm 33:6-9 What additional insight does this give us about God's creativity?
- God spoke the heavens and earth into existence. His word accomplished creation of physical reality.
- Hebrews 11:3 He made visible things out of invisible things. This matches what we know of particle physics.

God is Creative.

- Job 38 What are some of the processes God's creativity designed?
- The foundations of the earth, sizing it properly, setting limits for the sea, including the steady state springs of the sea,
- Setting up weather systems, including snow, rain, flood, thunder, lightening, frost.

God is Creative.

- Setting the path of the stars and the physical laws that rule planetary motion,
- giving mind and mental powers to humans,
- setting up ecological systems so that animals have food. He set up ecological niches for human safety according to Psalm 104.

Humans are creative, too.

- One of the most joyful things we can do is to create something new and good.
- Not only is the creativity a gift from God, and a glimpse of His image in human goodness—
- The joy of creating is a gift from Him—and He shares that joy. Proverbs 22:22-31— His wisdom delights in it.

God wants us to trust Him. But barriers to trust exist.

The suffering in this world is a barrier to trust for many people—the most frequently mentioned barrier.

If you focus on this problem, the sheer amount of suffering can seem overwhelming.

Worldviews that deny the existence of a good God have no way to define evil, so the suffering in this world is an incomprehensible given fact. Death is destiny. Bleakness wins.

The Bible gives us reasons to believe God exists and is GOOD!

In Class 2, we talked about first few chapters of Genesis. Their explanation of God's goodness offers the only hope for meaningfulness beyond suffering. The reality is that we see amazing evidence of God's greatness in creative power, AND we also see and feel unbearable suffering. Genesis 1-3 offers a very strong reason to trust God in spite of suffering in this world.

Generally, two approaches are taken to this problem outside belief in the God described in the Bible.

The Bible gives us reasons to believe God exists and is GOOD!

One approach is to say that only the material world is real. But then what do you believe about the mind?

The other approach is to take a blind leap of faith to supply meaning in life and to get around the problem of suffering. This gives emotional comfort but is irrational.

The Bible has a much better answer. It is a complicated answer. It is found in several different places. One must search to find it.

We should expect the answer to be complicated.

Truth matters.

Because God is real, and is GOOD as described in the Bible, we can know that suffering is **not** what He wants for people. He has a plan to eventually solve the problem, for everyone willing to cooperate with His plan. We are not going to go over the answer found in Genesis again today.

Instead, we shall begin with the answer found in **Job**. Then, we will begin with the answer of the **cross**.

These **three sets of answers** give us reason to trust God forever.

We can trust God more by understanding the Bible's complex answer

The Bible's Complex Answer to Job's Suffering

In Job's suffering.

1. Job was innocent.
2. The conflict was in the spiritual realm.
3. Job's friends misunderstood the principles involved.
4. Job needed a direct answer from God.
5. God did not give the answer, but gave Job directions about trust.

Job was innocent.

Job was blameless, upright, fearing God, and turning away from evil. Job was a man who cared for his family, praying for his children continually. He rescued people who were oppressed. He tried to maintain moral purity.

Job reminds me of my father as I was growing up, and my father's fatal disease with all its difficulties, eventually leading to his transfer to heaven, seemed as unjust as Job's experiences.

Job was innocent.

Goodness on a human scale does not rule out suffering in this life. This is the first insight beginning to define the problem of suffering. So Job's answer to the question "why?" is an important answer.

"⁷ Yet man is born to trouble, as the sparks fly upward." Job 5:7 NKJV

The conflict was in the spiritual realm.

An unexplained contest is shown taking place between God and Satan in heaven. Job's integrity is apparently a very strong factor on God's side in the conflict.

The second insight in Job's suffering is that **our integrity matters far beyond what we can see or understand.**

Satan claims that he can destroy Job's integrity if God removes His protection from Job.

God's answer is to allow Satan to try.

The conflict was in the spiritual realm.

Satan destroyed Job's wealth, caused the death of Job's ten children, caused the death of most of his employees, and eventually destroyed Job's health.

In the process, Job lost the respect of his wife. He lost the respect of his village. He even lost the respect of the outcasts from his village.

All this time, Job did not know what was going on in the spiritual realm.

Yet he maintained his integrity.

Third important insight:

The RESOLVE to do what is right is absolutely essential for successfully navigating suffering.

Job's friends misunderstood the principles involved.

- Job's friends came to console him.
- They stayed a long time.
- They thought the operative principle in Job's troubles was God's justice.
- Therefore, they were sure Job must have done something terribly wrong.
- Therefore, they kept on counseling Job to confess, repent, seek God's forgiveness.

Job answered this way: ¹⁰ But He knows the way that I take; *When* He has tested me, I shall come forth as gold. ¹¹ My foot has held fast to His steps; I have kept His way and not turned aside. ¹² I have not departed from the commandment of His lips; I have treasured the words of His mouth More than my necessary *food*. “ Job 23:10-12 (NKJV) ⁵ Far be it from me That I should say you are right; Till I die I will not put away my integrity from me. ⁶ My righteousness I hold fast, and will not let it go; My heart shall not reproach *me* as long as I live. Job 27:5-6 (NKJV)

Job proclaimed his innocence and refused to cave to their pressure.

Job's friends forced Job to search for answers to the justice question.

In chapter 24, Job claims that the wicked do NOT always see their just punishment in this life, so suffering here cannot be assumed as punishment for sins.

How does Job say that justice will eventually be achieved? ¹⁹ As drought and heat consume the snow waters, *So the grave consumes those who have sinned.*
Job 24:19 (NKJV) Job says justice must take place after death.

For God to be just, and justice not to take place on earth, it must occur after death.

God's GOODNESS

Requires that eternity be real. If God is just, eternity must be real for humans.

Job's insight is validated elsewhere in the Old Testament.

Isaiah 66 describes separate ultimate destinies for the righteous and the wicked. Daniel 12 describes separate resurrections for the righteous and the wicked. The Scriptures are very consistent about this answer, and it implies both eternal life and eternal justice.

Job affirms faith in his future resurrection in chapter 19, verses 25-27.

Job 19:25-27

²⁵ For I know *that* my Redeemer lives,
And He shall stand at last on the
earth; ²⁶ And after my skin is
destroyed, this *I know*, That in my flesh
I shall see God, ²⁷ Whom I shall see for
myself, And my eyes shall behold, and
not another. *How my heart yearns
within me!* Job 19:25-27 (NKJV)

Job's Answer to the Problem of Suffering

Says that Hell is not a place of undeserved torture. Hell is a place of JUSTICE. God is JUST. Many places in the Bible affirm that we will all be judged according to our deeds.

Heaven is a place of MERCY and Justice—just rewards. God is MERCIFUL and JUST.

Read Ephesians 6:8 regarding justice in heaven.

Elihu brought up the idea that God might have another reason for Job's suffering...

Like preventing sins or preventing death, or ending pride.

This was the first inkling among Job's friends that Job's suffering was not a justice issue, and that God might have some other reason.

Elihu also brought up the importance of choosing LIFE in those circumstances.

Job 36:20-21

- ²⁰ Do not desire the night, When people are cut off in their place. ²¹ Take heed, do **not** turn to iniquity, For you have chosen this rather than affliction. Job 36:20-21 (NKJV)
- Euthanasia is NOT the right answer to the problem of suffering!
- Of all Job's friends, Elihu alone was not reproved by God.

Job needed a direct answer from
God for why he suffered.

Job 10:2-9 ² I will say to God, 'Do not condemn me; Show me why You contend with me. ³ *Does it* seem good to You that You should oppress, that You should despise the work of Your hands, and smile on the counsel of the wicked? ⁴ Do You have eyes of flesh? Or do You see as man sees? ⁵ *Are* Your days like the days of a mortal man?

Job needed a direct answer from
God for why he suffered.

Job 10:2-9 *Are* Your years like the days of a
mighty man, ⁶ that You should seek for my
iniquity And search out my sin, ⁷ although You
know that I am not wicked, And *there is* no one
who can deliver from Your hand? ⁸ 'Your hands
have made me and fashioned me, an intricate
unity; Yet You would destroy me. ⁹ Remember, I
pray, that You have made me like clay. And will
You turn me into dust again? Job 10:2-9 (NKJV)

God did **not** give the answer, but gave Job directions about **trust**.

God communicated directly with Job, but God did **not** tell Job a battle was going on in heaven. Instead, God asked Job if he understood the amazing things God understands.

God pointed out that Job could not accomplish justice on earth.

God pointed out that Job could not save himself.

God did not give the answer, but gave Job directions about trust.

God pointed out: ¹² Look on everyone *who is* proud, *and* bring him low;
Tread down the wicked in their place.
¹³ Hide them in the dust together,
Bind their faces in hidden *darkness*.
¹⁴ Then I will also confess to you That
your own right hand can save you. Job
40:12-14 (NKJV)

Job had to trust God. No other answer could possibly work.

God did not give the answer, but gave Job directions about trust.

Then God validated Job's righteousness.

God reproved the friends who had tried to make Job confess.

God promised to forgive them only when they sacrificed an expensive set of offerings and **JOB PRAYED FOR THEM.**

In the process, God required Job to forgive them for their false accusations, which had added so severely to his pain.

God did not give the answer, but gave Job directions about trust.

Then God restored Job's wealth, gave him a new big family, and gave him an extremely long life.

God gave us the insight that Job's integrity carried great weight in a battle between God and His worst enemy.

We can assume that our integrity is equally important—much more important than the suffering itself.

Job's long life is not enough.

- Job's future resurrection and eternal life are enough.
- **Until one accounts for eternity, the suffering of Job still makes no sense.**
- Thus, faith is a HUGE part of the answer to suffering, **depending upon the total goodness of God to make things right in eternity.**

Two obscure verses in Colossians parallel Job.

- Chapter 2 verses 14-15: Jesus' crucifixion had elements of a supernatural battle going on in the heavenly places—and a battle that reaches to each of us, although we cannot see it.
- **14** having blotted out the bond written in ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us: and he hath taken it out that way, nailing it to the cross; **15** having despoiled the principalities and the powers, he made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it. [ASV]
- Therefore, we do not have to know what the purpose is in our own suffering to be able to trust that it is important.

Even if suffering SEEMS
senseless,

It may not be senseless. It may
have a purpose that reaches far
beyond ourselves.

The New Testament does
describe senseless suffering.

Senseless suffering: Luke 13:1-5

- ¹ There were present at that season some who told Him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. ² And Jesus answered and said to them, "Do you suppose that these Galileans were worse sinners than all *other* Galileans, because they suffered such things? ³ I tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish. ⁴ Or those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them, do you think that they were worse sinners than all *other* men who dwelt in Jerusalem? ⁵ I tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish." Luke 13:1-5 (NKJV)

Jesus' answer to the problem of senseless suffering:

Earthly senseless suffering may happen without moral cause.

Eternal senseless suffering is **AVOIDABLE**.

- Choose repentance.
- That choice is more important than anything temporal—even the worst difficulties of life on earth.
- We must find the path to eternal life, and we must search to find it, and repentance is a corner we have to turn to reach the path.

This answer does not contradict Job's answer.

- Everybody is a sinner, so everyone needs to repent for the sake of eternal life.
- Refusing to repent, and accepting eternal suffering is senseless.
- Eternal suffering is a different issue from temporary, unjust suffering. Eternal suffering will be just—but it is unnecessary because the price of justice has already been met.

Because Messiah experienced all human suffering at the cross and is not limited by time,

The answer of the cross to the problem of suffering

1. He is able to come to our aid when we suffer
2. He is able to take away sins and give eternal life, thus making suffering temporary
3. He is able to transform us by the power of His resurrection. We become His ambassadors to win against suffering for other people.

Messiah experienced all human suffering at the cross and He is not limited by time.

His cry to Saul of Tarsus was **“Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?”** when Saul was persecuting Jesus’ followers.

Messiah was **in the fiery furnace** with the Israelites who were cast there by Nebuchadnezzar.

When He judges the nations, He will say, **“Whatever you did to the least important of these, you did to Me.”**

Isaiah 53

- ⁴ Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; Yet we esteemed Him stricken, Smitten by God, and afflicted. ⁵ But He *was* wounded for our transgressions, *He was* bruised for our iniquities; The chastisement for our peace *was* upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed. ⁶ All we like sheep have gone astray; We have turned, every one, to his own way; And the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all. Isaiah 53:4-6 (NKJV)

Because He experienced
suffering.

He is able to come to our aid
when we suffer

He is able to come to our aid when we
suffer

Hebrews 2:14-18, ¹⁴ Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through **death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil,** ¹⁵ **and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.**

He is able to come to our aid when we suffer

- ¹⁶ For indeed He does not give aid to angels, but He **does** give aid to the seed of Abraham.
- ¹⁷ Therefore, in all things He had to be made like *His* brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things *pertaining* to God, **to make propitiation for the sins of the people.**
- ¹⁸ For in that He Himself has suffered, being tempted, He is able **to aid those who are tempted.**

Because Messiah experienced
all human suffering at the cross

**He is able to take away sins
and give eternal life, thus
making suffering temporary.**

**That is exactly what He WANTS
TO DO for each person.**

1 Peter 2:21-25

- ²¹ For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps: ²² *"Who committed no sin, Nor was deceit found in His mouth";* ²³ who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed *Himself* to Him who judges righteously; ²⁴ **who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree,**

1 Peter 2:21-25

- that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness—by whose stripes you were healed. ²⁵ For you were like sheep going astray, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls. (NKJV)

He is able to take away sins and give eternal life, thus making suffering temporary

Paraphrasing Romans 5:12-21. Adam brought sin to all people through his disobedience, and death followed for us all, because all of us DO sin ourselves as well.

However, Jesus' righteous action is even more profound than Adam's unrighteous action.

He is able to take away sins and give eternal life, thus making suffering temporary

Jesus' righteous payment for our sin brings eternal life to all who are willing to receive it—it breaks the curse of sin and death.

The resurrection of Jesus proves that the curse was broken.

The “Seed of the Woman” crushed the Serpent’s head.

He is able to take away sins and give eternal life, thus making suffering temporary

The law helps us see our need of deliverance from sin, because it allows us to see how sinful we are.

Where sin was multiplied, God's grace was even more abundant—because the price Jesus paid was so very high.

Adam's failure was easy for Adam. Jesus' rescue was terribly difficult for Jesus. Yet that is the requirement for us to be made righteous after our own failures.

He is able to take away sins and give eternal life, thus making suffering temporary

- That abundant Grace of Jesus wins and reigns forever.
- His resurrection reveals that He lives forever—that death could not defeat Him. He became flesh for us, and went through that for us, so we could SEE the reality of eternal life. He already had eternal life, but the resurrection lets us see it.

He is able to transform us by the power of His resurrection.

We become His ambassadors to win against suffering for other people.

He transforms us.

2 Corinthians 5:17-21 ¹⁷ Therefore, if anyone *is* in Christ, **he is a new creation**; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new. ¹⁸ Now all things *are* of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, ¹⁹ that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation.

2 Corinthians 5:17-21

- ²⁰ Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore *you* on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God. ²¹ For He made Him who knew no sin *to be* sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him. (NKJV)

He transforms us.

- **14 For by one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified.** ¹⁵ But the Holy Spirit also witnesses to us; for after He had said before, ¹⁶ *"This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, says the LORD: I will put My laws into their hearts, and in their minds I will write them,"* ¹⁷ then He adds, *"Their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more."* ¹⁸ Now where there is remission of these, *there is no longer an offering for sin.* Hebrews 10:14-18 (NKJV)

2 Corinthians 5:21

- Hebrews 10:10 ¹⁰ By that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. (NKJV)
- Sanctified means being set apart for God in righteousness, or to be made righteous or holy.

God persuades. He does not coerce people into heaven.

- The cross is the answer that **MAKES** the suffering of this world **TEMPORARY**. This is the answer that opens up heaven to people, where suffering will be entirely **OVER**.
- God demonstrated His own love **in the most difficult and necessary way**, by sending Messiah to take away our sins through suffering.

Romans 8:1-2

- There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.
- For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death.

Micah 7:18

- ¹⁸ Who *is* a God like You, Pardoning iniquity And passing over the transgression of the remnant of His heritage? He does not retain His anger forever, Because He delights *in* mercy.
¹⁹ He will again have compassion on us, And will subdue our iniquities. You will cast all our sins Into the depths of the sea.
(NKJV)

Homework Class 3 Set 1

- Read the book of Job in the Old Testament. If you do not have opportunity to read the entire book, then read the references in the next set of homework, and note them in your Bible.

Homework Class 3 Set 2

- Read Job chapter 1. How was Job described?
- Who are the individuals in conflict in this chapter?
- What outcome does God want from that conflict?
- What did Satan do to Job?
- Did Job know that was going on in the background?
- What error did Job's friends make in the advice they gave Job?
- How did Job answer that bad advice in chapter 23:10-12 and 27:5?

Homework Class 3 Set 2

- In chapter 24, Job claims that the wicked do NOT always see their just punishment in this life, so suffering cannot be assumed as punishment for sins. How does Job say that justice will eventually be achieved, in verse 19 of chapter 24?
- Job's friend Elihu gives some other possibilities for God's actions in chapter 33 verses 12-18 and 26-30, and in chapter 37:13. What are those purposes?

Homework Class 3 Set 2

- What good advice does Elihu give in chapter 36 verses 20-21?
- What answer does God give Job in chapters 38-41?
- In chapter 42 verse 7-9, does God approve the advice of Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar?

Homework Class 3 Set 2

- What does God require Job to do for those friends in verse 8 and 10?
- When Job passed every test, including the “forgiving others” test, what did God do?
- Does the book explain what Job’s suffering accomplished in the heavenly realm?

Homework Class 3 Set 2

- Is anyone immune from suffering?
- Is there comfort in believing God has a hidden purpose we cannot see for the suffering He allows?
- How does the idea of inerrancy of Scripture contribute to the comfort level?

Homework Class 3 Set 3

- Matthew 7:13-14 What is the basic problem human beings face?
- Luke 13:1-5 What kind of suffering was described here? What did Jesus say about that?

If such disasters could be described as *senseless suffering*, how does God view the failure of humans to repent?

- In Daniel chapter 3, who is the fourth Person in the fiery furnace?

Homework Class 3 Set 3

- In Matthew 25:31-46, what does Jesus say about suffering that people cause to others?
- In Acts 9:1-5, what did Jesus say was going on when Saul persecuted others?
- In Hebrews 2:14-18, what are two purposes for the suffering Jesus endured at the cross?
- Does Jesus understand our suffering? Is He there for us in the middle of suffering?

Homework Class 3 Set 3

- How is that related to the two parts of Romans 6:23?
- How does Jesus' resurrection reveal the truth of eternal life?
- How does the resurrection of Jesus overcome the curse of death in Genesis chapter 3?
- Read Romans 5:12-21. Try to put the concepts in those verses in your own words.

Homework Class 3 Set 3

- How does the bruising of Jesus' heel at the cross crush the head of the serpent of Genesis 3?
- How can this be an answer to the problem of suffering in this world?
- Read 2 Peter 3:8-9. What purpose does God have when He delays judgments against evil?

Homework Class 3 Set 3

- According to 2 Corinthians 5:17-21 what are God's goals for the cross? How is this related to Messiah's title *The LORD our Righteousness*, in Jeremiah 23:5-6?
- Is God immune from suffering?
- Is suffering a continuing experience in heaven for people?—Revelation 21:4